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THE ENLARGING
CONCEPTION OF GOD
HERBERT ALDEN YOUTZ

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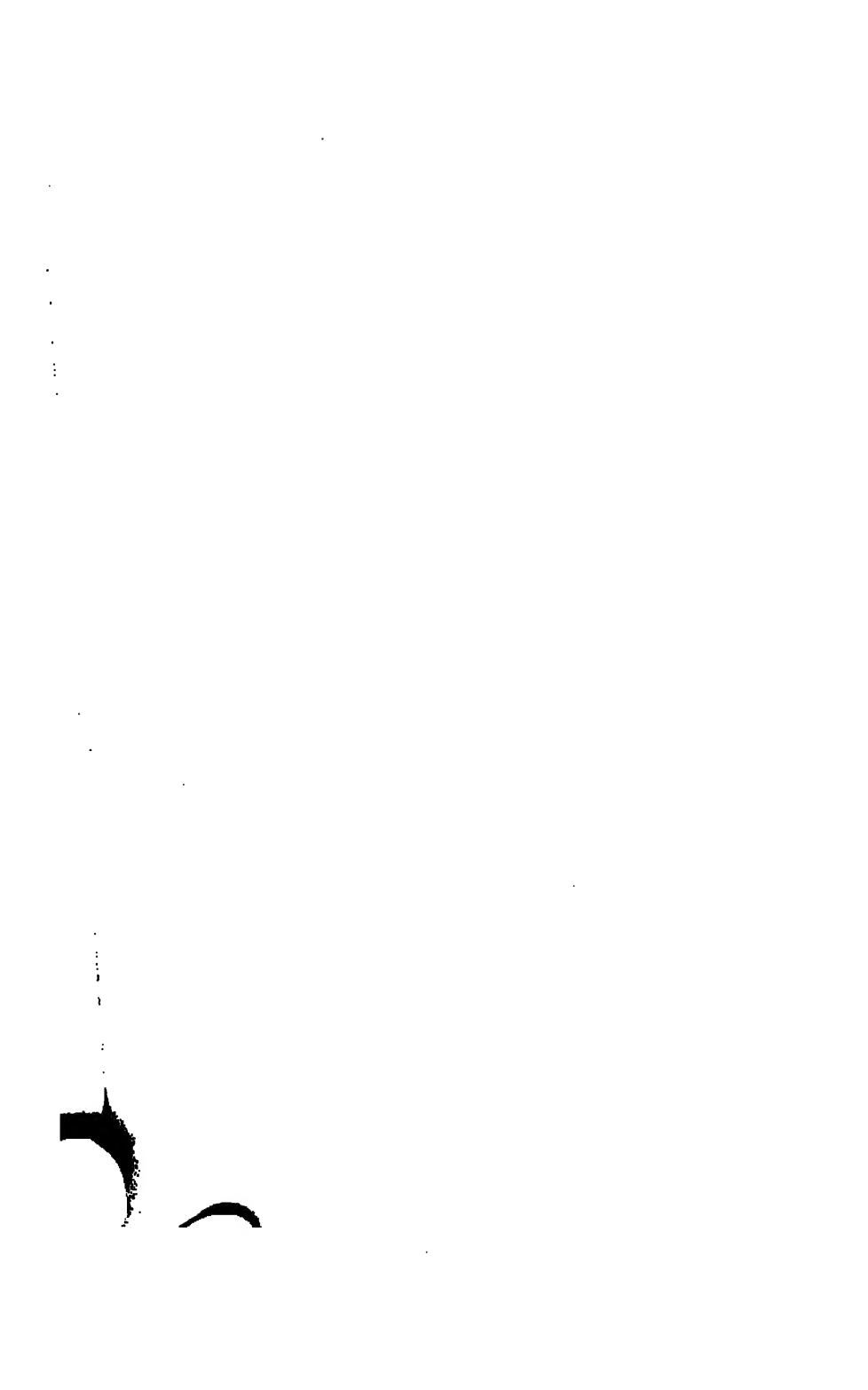


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THE ENLARGING CONCEPTION OF GOD

BY

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AUBURN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

New York

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1914

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THIS BOOK
IS INSCRIBED WITH GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION
TO THE MEMORY OF
BORDEN PARKER BOWNE
PHILOSOPHER AND TEACHER
BY ONE OF HIS STUDENTS TO WHOM HE COMMUNICATED
SOMETHING OF HIS ZEAL FOR THE TRUTH WHICH
SETS FREE, AND SOMETHING OF HIS
ENTHUSIASM FOR THE TEACH-
ER'S LEAVENING POWER



PREFACE

THESE essays, with the exceptions of Chapters III and IV, were not originally designed to form chapters of a book. Chapter I is an address given before the New York State Conference of Religion. Chapters II and V were published in the *Harvard Theological Review*, by the courtesy of whose editors they are used here. The unity of theme and treatment, we believe, does not suffer from this undesigned assembling; and there is a gain in concreteness by reason of the fact that each chapter was intended to stand in its own right. Certain repetitions were almost inevitable, but all of the discussions have been revised to make the argument as concise as seemed consistent with its pedagogical purpose. The last chapter is a sermon preached to students; and as a "laboratory" example of the theological method advocated will be more effective than a theoretical discussion

of the subject. I make grateful acknowledgment here to many whose writings have helped me, from a number of whom I have quoted without specific acknowledgment.

HERBERT ALDEN YOUTZ.

AUBURN, N. Y.,
January 1, 1914.

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THE ENLARGING CONCEPTION OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

OF all the forms of human hunger, none are more persistent and universal than the hunger for the spiritual. "Man's search for God is as plain a fact as his search for food." To one who sympathetically traces in history this spiritual search, the pathos, the greatness, the sacredness of the quest for religious reality is awesome. No famine has ever starved and devastated like spiritual famine. On the other hand the great, courageous, conquering spirits of earth have been those who have gone forth "in the power of the spirit." Spiritual religion has been the energy of all great achievement. The motive and the leadership of all human progress have been supplied by men and women who, like Jesus, have had meat to eat which their followers knew not of.

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The consummate significance of religion and the significance of those who labour for its direction is partly lost upon us both by reason of the very universality of religion and by the almost infinite variety of religious phenomena. The dissipation of the sense of the worth of religion by the disturbing sense of the trivialities and the petty differentiations of religions is a peril that besets us all. The very unity and majesty of God is lost in the multiplicity of the forms of His revelation. The very hunger is overlooked in the curious contemplation of the grotesque and baffling forms in which men seek to satisfy the appetite for the eternal. While the attempts which we have made, ecclesiastical and theological, to —
— make God concrete and distinctive and thus rescue Him from generalities and abstractions by identifying Him with our special communion or creed or dogma, — these attempts have produced in our day a haunting scepticism which threatens to be the undoing of the conviction which such efforts aim to establish.

In this practical dilemma, facing the choice of God as a transcendental, un-

thinkable abstraction on the one hand, and the petty orthodox God of a sect on the other, the temptation has been to give up the task of achieving a rational religion. Not a few have noisily avowed their loyalty to religion and their scorn for all theological attempts. But this emancipation is sure to prove premature. The religious hunger continues to cry out for spiritual food. Enlightened religion cannot be formless. An utterly unintelligible God is no God at all. The religious satisfaction of an intelligent man demands such thoughts about God and spiritual reality as will harmonize with his rational and ethical outlook on life. The rebellion is really against certain types of religious conception, not against religious interpretation as such. Theology is a permanent task.

The characteristic religious phenomena of our own day witness clearly both to the religious hunger and to our confusion in handling the problem. We are fumbling for organizing principles and for crystallizing forms of activity which shall satisfyingly express religious reality for thought and life. Rationalisms and mys-

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ticisms and rituals which have satisfied certain temperaments and certain ages do not wholly fathom our need. The modern "psychologizing" habit of thought has contributed a better analysis of the religious problem, but the positive contribution of psychologies of religion has been over-rated. At all events we are left groping for a method of presenting spiritual truth which shall be both convincing and nourishing. The critical problem for the religious preacher and teacher to-day is the problem of method in thinking or interpreting religious truth so that the heart shall be satisfied without scandalizing the mind; and the mind shall be satisfied without starving the heart.

This statement might seem a sufficient justification for offering a volume of essays on constructive theological method. But the timeliness of the attempt is only the more apparent when the characteristics of our age are noted more in detail. For example, certain currents set strongly against the undertaking to rethink the great religious problems of life. With the din of the "practical" sounding in one's

ears, the importance of systematic thinking about spiritual values is likely to be overlooked. This is a practical age. We want results. We are impatient with the man who cannot "deliver the goods." Moreover, we require an early delivery; else we change our patronage to the man who guarantees a rush order. This mood has affected every district of life.

Now the soundness of this counsel of the practical cannot be questioned; but its precise significance and its point of application may be unclear. The short-sightedness of an overdone principle of the practical, when applied to human values, is apparent. In our educational methods dealing with ethical and spiritual forces, it is easy to make practical requirements that stifle and deaden the finest and highest things. Manifestly that is practical which in the long run administers to the highest and finest forms of personal life. That is most efficient which in the long run "delivers the goods"; but there is room for inquiry as to the nature of the "goods" to be delivered, and also as to the time and place of the delivery. For

example, to measure public school efficiency in terms of "the earning capacity of the child during the first ten years after graduation" is a degrading conception of education. The "vocational" measure of education is likely to be peculiarly oblivious to this danger.

Our immediate concern is with the larger ministry of the church. A rather confused and crass sense of need of a practical ministry to the people is demanding a type of preacher who can "produce results." Frequently the size of the result demanded is in inverse ratio to its quality. Many of the evangelistic campaigns are concessions to this utilitarian demand for a man who can "deliver the goods." The rise of the business manager type of preacher is another evidence of the concession. On a thoughtful analysis of the results thus attained will answer this practical spirit according to its folly. "Big business" & spiritual culture must not be confused; they have different aims and ideals, must pursue different methods.

Ultimately this counsel of the practical comes back to the training institution

which prepare young men for the ministry. It is seen first of all in the rise of a number of "training schools" which offer short cuts to the ministry in terms of an equipment, which will fit, like armour, upon every student, whatever his spiritual and intellectual calibre. "Practical workers" are thus produced with no capacity to understand or direct the deeper forces of spiritual ministry. The results here are often lamentable in the character of the minister thus sent out to do the "work of the Lord."

But even in the best equipped schools of theological preparation, aiming at thoroughness and completeness, the demand for practical men and for practical training comes rolling in from the churches, and must be dealt with. It is largely a valid demand and has called forth cordial response. The more alert and aggressive institutions are heeding the demand by reconstructed courses of study and pedagogical methods abreast with the best education of the times. The readjustment to the sensitively felt need has been truly remarkable, and furnishes a fascinat-

ing chapter in the annals of religious education.

Still under the stress of the church's demand for practical men and for urgently needed results, the tendency is for the finer issues of spiritual meaning and the subtler forces of spiritual ministry to become obscured by the palpable appeal of immediate efficiency. Within a divinity school offering the best educational facilities calculated to equip a man for religious ministry to society, the atmosphere of the practical descends about the student, creating a mirage — a reversal of values — that may measurably defeat the higher ends of education. The student of the Bible is tempted to let the most effective mode of using the Bible supersede the honest search for the account of religious truth that is therein. For should not Bible interpretation function with the public demand? Homiletics has its great reward for the preacher who would make a "strong impression" upon the pastorless church. Apologetics easily becomes a lawyer's search for "exceptions," or a form of special pleading. Systematic theology is expected to

help the student graduate to pass the examination for conference, presbytery, or classis; hence fundamental principles are sometimes obscured by the stress of local doctrinal issues. Sociologies are studied for panaceas rather than for principles. And even church history may trace the movements of its own denomination on a map of larger scale than that of the rest of the Christian world. For every man can use these special products to bring results. He is asked to deliver the goods, and he lays up the brand that will be called for. Haphazard methods of theological thinking are apt to be formed by the student who breathes this atmosphere of efficiency.

Scholarship, in the best sense of the word, must struggle for supremacy not only with the student but with the teacher. The conservative method tends to hold the field because it functions with the social consciousness of the majority, and therefore "produces results." The progressive method may not so function with its environment and hence may not produce the same sense of efficiency. The beaten paths offer least resistance and call for less original

pedagogical skill. The authority of the practical is distinctly encouraging to the teacher who is content to pour his wine into the waiting "old bottles." And the demand of the practical, on the other hand, is distinctly discouraging to the gratuitous task of supplying new bottles in addition to filling them. Thus the condition imposed of producing results in the realm of religious teaching, tends to encourage the popular, the superficial, the traditional. To galvanize an old conception into life is a pedagogical feat which wins more applause than a reconstruction of the conception. It runs less risk of "overturning faith," of alienating the constituency, and is therefore the economical and fruitful mode of procedure. The inevitable outcome is the "mediating" theologian with a compromise.

But when we think the matter through on large lines and construe the practical in terms of wider horizons, the pettiness and shortsightedness of much of the practical plea appears. The stimulus of original thinking, great conceptions of life and its meaning, as a practical dynamic in pro-

ducing effective men, is too much discounted in the utilitarian pressure of to-day. Short cuts and training for immediate results do not encourage the profound thinking that arouses men to heroism for the sake of "far-off" divine events, or for the sake of "unseen things" which are eternal. The mark of great religious interpretation has always been the ability to see life in its cosmic significance. The thoughts and convictions that nourish great living still "lay hold upon eternal life." Life must be seen with wide horizons — with background and foreground and sky. Without this setting, it shrivels into petty secularism.

Nevertheless there is a lingering superstition that strenuous thinking is a menace to the profoundest experiences of religion. The highest fruits of religious living are supposed to be unattainable by the type of mind which is eager to grasp the scientific and scholarly account of the religious life. This attitude tacitly puts a premium upon superstition and ignorance in the name of piety. The truth that religion has redemptive power for the humblest and most illiterate is sometimes distorted to allege that

an illiterate religion is a mark of exceptional piety and spiritual power. But ignorance has no monopoly of spiritual vision and power. A distinguished pastor, leaving his field to teach theological students, expressed to his own congregation the nature and power of his new call in significant language: "We have gone in these days so far after the fashion of the gospel for the simple and ignorant, that we have come nigh to the state of things where only the ignorant can take any pleasure in the gospel which they sometimes hear. The neglected, and if I may use the detestable phrase, 'unchurched' class, is very apt to be to-day the cultivated and thoughtful class, the intellectually and morally rich." This severe arraignment of the state of religious interpretation seems to us to find justification in many instances. The riches of spiritual experience are too often exhibited as the fruits of forms of belief which do not hold our convictions. Liberal spirits are often made to feel that the realization of their highest spiritual longings are somehow conditioned upon the acceptance of forms of religious belief against which they

are in rational rebellion. Behind the essays of this book there is a sense of responsibility to spiritual friends who are not "fed" by any shepherds; — a longing to minister to needy and hungry souls whose education and culture make a too "popular" gospel an offence to both mind and heart. And particularly are we ambitious to administer to a multitude of awakening student-spirits who are seeking to assimilate the age-old religious confidence to the scholarship acquired in colleges and universities.

The spirit of distrust which dreads the effect upon piety of thorough-going scholarship is found even among theological students. Many a student shudders at the spiritual risk involved in the intellectual approach to the Bible, to theology, and to the deep things of the soul. In the university, the spirit of fearless inquiry is exalted; but here he feels that the sacred things are to be shielded from the spirit of inquiry, the very spirit which he exalts in a university. The spiritual and the intellectual he is apt to regard as mutually alien. He leans toward undisciplined mysticism or toward traditional accounts of the truth. I

have seen men resist the analysis of the class-room on the plea that these things are to be "accepted," and not inquired into. I have heard members of graduating classes thank God that they have been "kept" during the trying intellectual experiences of a course in theology, or perhaps deprecating that they had lost some very precious thing by reason of the intellectual discipline of the divinity school. Such soul tragedies, real or only apprehended, are induced by a psychological attitude which at least does not see that there is an intellectual element in the highest type of piety. To love God with the mind as well as the heart is a condition of stable Christianity. It is impossible to believe that prejudice and narrow conformity — taking too often the form of mental indolence and fanaticism — are more confident avenues of approach to the divine than the fine, open, eager spirit of intelligent inquiry. It is surely laid upon our divinity schools to remove the superstition that faithful intellectual work, whether in the name of Higher Criticism, New Theology, evolutionary principles, or any other buga-

boo, is a menace to the soul. It is a duty indeed to show that a supreme service of these educational institutions is to teach the unspeakable enrichment of religion which intellectual faithfulness and thoroughness reveal. The spiritual security of alert, intelligent piety is not inferior to the security of mentally passive piety. Neither is strenuous Christianity always superior to meditative Christianity.

In the last analysis the spiritual way to treat thought-problems is to *think* them! The spirit of the Christian religion is essentially the spirit of truth; and any false note which in its concern for the "spiritual," evades the task of truth, is to that extent an enemy of Christ. To blur intellectual distinctions is, in the end, to blur spiritual vision. Religion must be clear-eyed as well as pure of heart. Thus only does the discipline of theology stand the practical test of rendering the highest *service* to the spirit.

Of course the kind of life that religious belief creates must be the ultimate judgment pronounced upon the truth of the religious philosophy involved. Creeds must

be judged by the heroisms, the humanities, the service, the character, — in short the civilization they have produced. The Christian has always been known as a “believer,” and “unbelief” has always been a sin and a term of reproach. Men of conviction, men of great beliefs, have been the real forces in all personal and social progress; hence the Christian church has been preëminent in supplying leadership for human progress. Thus the education of the beliefs of the church may be a task which contributes not less to personal efficiency and power than do the other more concrete aspects of training for religious leadership. The call for “practical” training for religious leadership in the church is not a call to disregard constructive original thinking. No emphasis upon “doing things” can justify mental indolence or intellectual poverty. Even the shibboleth “Social Christianity” is sometimes made to conceal a shabby ideal of manhood. If efficiency of leadership depends ultimately upon men of conviction who have thought deeply upon the great religious problems of the race and who are

thus able to educate the convictions of others, let us frankly encourage our divinity schools to produce *better thinkers*. If the true dynamics of life are indeed in the convictions and creeds that burn in men's hearts and impel them to their highest achievements, let us frankly admit that we are facing the problem of efficiency in dealing with the content of religion. If wrestling with the great thought-problems is a condition of the highest spiritual efficiency, let us seriously aim to produce better and more independent thinkers in our divinity schools; men who are able to think things through to the fundamental moral issues on which the eternal righteousness stands. Let us drop the false antithesis between practical and scholarly men. The dread of dogmatism and the other perils that beset men of passion and conviction can never justify us in offering "trained" leaders instead of "educated" leaders. The popular *demand* of the churches should not blind religious educators to the *need* of the churches. The leadership most needed to-day is that of men with such a grip upon fundamental

verities that they can see the problem of life whole; men who shall be able to bring from within the regenerative forces to transform society, and not be mere masters of devices to stir men to shallow emotions or external reforms. Strenuous intellectual mastery seems to be the path to this higher efficiency.

That the experimental method but slowly displaces the old apriorism in theology is a matter of common observation. There is a great lack of directness and concreteness even in modernized statements of religious truth. Much theology requires us to toil laboriously around mountains that were long ago tunnelled. In some cases a better faith has removed the mountains themselves. This clinging to primitive theological methods exhibits something of the mental habits which Gulliver observed in the tailors of Laputa. One of their peculiarities, according to Swift, was that they measured no man directly for a suit of clothes, but employed a quadrant to get his altitude as though he were some distant astronomical body. Then they figured out

the dimensions of his clothes by complex mathematical formulæ. One can imagine the fit produced by such a method !

The deviousness of much theological literature in treating religious problems as distant, "heavenly" bodies, and the insistence upon traditional formulæ, have not always resulted in a theological garment that covers our spiritual nakedness. It has resulted rather in a quaint fashion which distinguishes theological thinking from other forms of interpretation. Theology must outgrow the suspicion of being an esoteric science prepared and preserved by a race of priests. If religion is to meet and solve the unrest of to-day, it must come with the simplicity and directness of all truth which has its authority and witness within, — in the need and nature of our human. Theology as religious interpretation, thus becomes cognate with all of our accredited thinking about human realities.

It is no academic motive that has produced the following papers. Rather is it a profoundly religious motive which covets all of the insight of modern thinking and

culture for the service of the spiritual. Too often has it been observed that liberal thought and devout religion have been arrayed in opposing camps. The liberals have commonly shown little religious passion, and the religious have shown too little liberalism of thought. Such a divorce is a scandal. It is not good for the one—or the other—to be alone. *Liberalism in itself is no Gospel!* It is only a husk; and the Gospel is a kernel or content. On the other hand illiterate evangelism easily degenerates into an immoral superstition. The best thought and culture in the service of the heart-values, the character-forces and spiritual revelations of life,—this is the ideal of these essays. The writer is not straining after a “new theology,” but is striving after religious reality. He counts himself a passionate believer in the verities of evangelical religion, working with the conviction that theological explanation should be emancipated from paralyzing, out-worn traditions, and move confidently in terms of the noblest thinking and the deepest insights of contemporary life. The author’s spiritual fellowship is with the

faithful army of preachers of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, at home and on the foreign field. A more heroic and uplifting service than that rendered by the Christian ministry has never been witnessed. The hope of being able to offer help for the thought-problems of some of these labourers brings a thrill of satisfaction. If, in these discussions, lapses are discernible from our avowed ideals both of breadth and of spirituality, we still avow that this is no part of the underlying intention, but the expression of the imperfect "personal equation."

CHAPTER I

THE ENLARGING CONCEPTION OF GOD

RELIGION as we know it is not some holy thing apart, let down out of heaven, which cannot be touched with human hands. It is a human product. It is holy in the degree that it is our highest human growth.

→ The process by which we grasp the fact of God in terms of our human, and interpret our human life in the conviction of the divine, is religion. It is a process which inevitably lays religion open to the limitations and the blunders of the experimental method, as well as to the triumphs of experience. All of the ideals by which we are experimentally feeling our way to our best life will be reflected in our religion. Our sciences, philosophies, economics, social and industrial ideals, above all our moral history, will be registered in the advance or decline of our religious consciousness.

Religion springs eternal in the heart, a germ not of our own planting. But human


life is the soil, climate, sunshine, and the culture which condition and direct its growth. Religion can be smothered, distorted into grotesque forms, controlled in formal gardens, or cultivated into luxuriant, life-nourishing growth. It is not a constant quantity ; but rather it responds sensitively to the God-conception within, and the conception of God, in turn, is shaped by life's ideals as they arise. Though the ideal of God reacts powerfully upon all of our controlling ideals, it is still true that the God whom we worship is conditioned and shaped by the ideals which outline and express our whole mental and spiritual outlook.

This pragmatic shaping power of ours in the realm of religion is illustrated graphically in the history of the Christian church, where the conceptions reflected in many types of doctrinal explanation vary radically, each typical doctrine being shaped by the ruling conceptions of the time. The progress of the history illustrates the advancing stages of enlightenment and culture. The examination of this relative element is the gist of most modern historical and psychological emphasis in studying

religion to-day. Why did people believe in certain religious ideals? What factors of life impelled them to this belief? How shall we rationally evaluate the belief? This rational attitude toward the past is fast coming to the service of the present and the future. We have a deep concern to examine these relative forces that are shaping our God-consciousness, and to inquire into their effectiveness and validity. Do the life-forces which shaped the ideals of the past still hold us? Do the ideals which shape our God-idea function with the ideals that control men's thinking to-day? In a moving, changing world, the conservative attempt to hold over, in religion, conceptions that our times have left behind is paralyzing to religious vitality. The conception of God not only does, but must, reflect the ruling mental ideals of the times, if it is to feed heart-hungry men. If the living convictions of to-day do not find expression in the religion which we teach, if we never so earnestly endeavour to enforce fundamental convictions in the form of mental conceptions that controlled another age and do not hold the best belief of our day,

we shall bind the religious power that we long to emancipate. Says La Touche: "The most disastrous thing that could come to the spiritual life of any age is that it should not be responsive to the thought of its age."

Fruitful years of study, invention, discovery, and achievement have changed the face of the earth; have enlarged every sphere of life; and have bound us all up in a newly discovered unity that means new power, new responsibility, new potentialities for the blessing or the cursing of human life. With this profound movement there has come a not less profound change of thought-habits in regarding the world. New ideals of thought have come into being, new methods of study unknown to our predecessors, a new mental attitude toward life. The scientific habit, the pragmatic test of truth, the practical estimate of life's values and meanings, the deepened social sense through which we see all moral significance, — these and other ideals have so shaped the thought and consciousness of our age that the modern man already finds it hard to grasp clearly and sympathetically the ideals that prevailed before science awoke. Most text-



books written one hundred years ago seem written for some other world than ours. And they were !

The beneficence of this new and mighty thought-movement is no part of our problem. From this enlarging life, with its essentially new ideals of thought and study and method and meaning in our mental approach to the world, what have been the consequences for religion? In this age, keyed as never before to the ideal of effectiveness, what about the problem of the religious effectiveness of the larger views? Has the releasing of all this power, and all these ideals of method and meaning and worth found effective recognition in the field of religion? Has religion, the most fundamental and potent force for blessing human life, kept pace with the growing life by which it is conditioned?

→ *Has religion translated its wealth of knowledge into power?*

It is not too much to say that there is maladjustment here which ought to receive the attention of every religious teacher. There is non-effectiveness, a waste of power and of possibilities for human

betterment such as may well grieve the soul of the consecrated religious teacher, and stir him to alertness and reëxamination of his pedagogical presuppositions. Not the least sin of the preacher may be that he does not discern the signs of his times, but is still thundering to his people concerning "the sign of the prophet Jonah." The real problem here is not whether Jonah ever lived and was swallowed by a fish. It is rather whether Jonah functions with our age. It is not primarily a question of historical veracity, but of pedagogical propriety and religious effectiveness.

This maladjustment and religious non-effectiveness is manifest at two points: first, in our reluctance to give our enlarging conceptions of life a place in our conception of God; second, in our failure to bring our enlarged conception of God into convincing, authoritative relations with life, and thus place it at the service of men.

I

The first phase of the problem arises from our failure to admit into religious conceptions the wealth of insight that has

been won in every other field of thought. The problem roots in the fact that we are controlled by a theory of knowledge in religion which forbids our opening up and enriching our thought of God. The way men have been accustomed to think about God is uncritically assumed to be not only the final account, but also a chief consideration in keeping Him steady! Because Abraham or Paul saw God clearly through windows of ancient architecture, we insist upon looking through their windows, whether or not we see the vision. We insist upon keeping our windows open toward Jerusalem, when they ought to open upon the life of to-day. This is a fatal mood for the man who wants to achieve effective spiritual leadership. However it may be accounted for, there is in the Christian church a strongly entrenched aversion to admitting new conceptions into theology. This is doubtless due partly to native conservatism in dealing with sacred facts; partly to an absolute and static philosophy which contributed its spirit and method to most orthodox theology formulated in the Middle Ages.

Theology, more than any other discipline, has disregarded the laws of living thought as rooted in the life of the present. Too often theology, instead of being articulated into life, has thought it sufficient to repeat the formulations of the past, to quote some sacred, infallible source, thus existing in a vacuum untouched and uninfluenced by the life of to-day.

The penalty of this failure to think the living God in terms of the living conceptions of to-day is unreality in religious language and anæmia in religious living. The penalty of leading a theological student to his God-idea through the stereotyped doctrines and systems of a dead past is too often to leave him — by his own confession — “without a message for the present.” The only way to bring the Living God into the life of to-day is to obey the deep laws of life, and rehabilitate this August Reality whom men worship, in the thought-garments of to-day. The time-garments of no age are sacred above those of any other. The worth of all conceptions of God is in their power to make Him real to men. The prevailing method

of theology not only involves a questionable theory of knowledge, but it makes
→ men feel that there was more of God in the past than in the present. This is the worst heresy !

The deplorable fact that the message of religion is failing to hold men has its explanation partly in the fact that religious teachers and preachers are largely engaged
→ in presenting God and his meaning in terms of outgrown conceptions. These conceptions do not grip men and hence do not awaken and nourish the native religious impulse. The God of doctrinal teaching
→ is not large enough to inspire our worship. The enlarging conceptions lie at hand, the thought-vehicles of our age. Our message, our meaning, our vision must be mediated in terms of these things, or we shall withhold the revelation of God from the life of to-day. If to-day's life is not
seen as God's — *sub specie aeternitatis* — it will be recorded as an appalling age of secularism ! God must be known to men
of to-day in terms of the thought and life of to-day, or not at all. ✓

But, confessedly, the old rigidity is

breaking up, and a better thought of God is dawning upon the world. The laws of valid and vital thinking are asserting themselves, and through the visions of to-day's life men are catching glimpses of the Eternal at work, blessing the life of to-day. There is an enlarging conception of God.

Still, the new vision is not definite and consistent. It is indistinct and confused. It is not yet at home in our consciousness. Men still look wistfully toward the past ✓ with its definite lines, its confident beliefs, its commanding authority. There were prophets in the past. There are so many confused voices in the present. We need translators of the visions of God, whose task it shall be to show convincingly that we are not called to follow new gods, but that the God of the past is the God of the ✓ present; that we may think to-day's life in terms of his purpose and presence. This we must do without disturbing our religious continuity with the past. In these changing times we need to teach men security and confidence in the enlarging conception of God which is dawning; to point out the familiar vision of the Eternal

One, the Light of all our living, the Might of all our achieving. The twilight stage, the stage of distrust, of scepticism, of secularism, calls for leadership to point out the emerging form of the Divine. Leaders of religious thought have their opportunity here to contribute to the problem of practical efficiency. The difficulty is largely a thought-difficulty. The remedy must be supplied by the thinkers.

II

The other phase of the problem has to do not with the intellectual acceptance of the enlarging conception of God, but with a matter of equally portentous concern. As a mental concept, the enlarging thought is slowly compelling acceptance. The enlarging life and the ruling ideals and thought-habits of to-day are finding recognition in our ever broadening religious ideals. Preaching is increasingly characterized by new breadth. But the new breadth is not always characterized by a *new passion*. Enlarging mental conceptions are compelling an enlarging conception of God; but the newer thought of God is not yet

completely at the service of the deeper, vital needs of life. We *think* a larger God,✓ but we do not *realize* his presence. We conceive Him; but we do not trust Him. Prayer has not kept pace with preaching. The newer ministry of the gospel of God is still conspicuously a ministry to intellectual peace. Just as the older thought of God does not function with the intellectual consciousness of to-day, so the newer, enlarging conception does not function adequately with the moral consciousness and the deep religious need. It does not bring adequately the sense of the *power* of the Divine to the life of to-day. This dynamic problem of religion is not merely a matter of right mental adjustment. For religious ministry which deals only with the intellectual phase of the problem soon creates a religious aristocracy, an intellectual exclusiveness, out of which indeed much wisdom may emerge, but no creative power. A deeper problem than correct and true conceptions of God is the problem of so clothing this new and better conception with power, and so endowing it with life, that the conception shall mediate to us

the Divine Reality, the Living God. Scholarship has an obligation here beyond the formulations of the enlarging conception. *Noblesse oblige*. We must put the conception at the service of life. We must help men to a deeper realization of the presence of God.


The reality of God as *power* and *activity* is the conviction that must lay hold of society before religion can gain its august and absolute authority over life. In a time of radical readjustment of religious conceptions, the danger is that we shall lose the power of the old, and find no corresponding power in the new. This is precisely the religious malady of to-day. We have enlarging conceptions of God. But the confidence, the security, the assurance of God as a Great Companion and Helper and Co-worker, — this phase of living, commanding religion has not kept pace with our better thought. In the last analysis, I believe that this is the menace to the higher life of society. Better conceptions of God cannot take the place of the realization of the present power of God.

Moreover, I am a modern man in a modern world. It seems to me to be the first duty of optimistic thought to seek for present help in the life of the present. I distrust the mode of piety which always turns to a sacred past to find how near God comes to men. A vital problem for me is "Does God come to human life now? — and How?" There are saints a plenty who can find God in the Old Testament, and sages who can find God in the Greek lyrics, who have little sense of the presence of God in modern life. That is a dangerous heresy of the religious life, — to trace God's presence and purpose in another age, and not be confident of his presence and out-working purposes in the life of our own day!

For centuries our moral and religious convictions have grown with tendril and root about an unscientific world-view. Thought-habits have impelled us to seek the credentials of divinity in certain definite tokens. These tokens are largely discredited by modern thinking. And the result is confusion, lack of confidence, a weakened hold on the divine. The power

of the Infinite is no longer at the service of our human endeavour. Intelligent leaders can no longer give unquestioning credence to the old, and they have not yet learned to trust the new implicitly. The amphibious preacher—breathing both the old atmosphere and the new, influenced both by fable and by science—does not nourish a robust spiritual life for himself, and is likely to guide his people only to an anæmic spiritual existence. The crying problem here is created by maladjustment to the enlarging conception of God.


As a first principle of solution, we may point out that just as the religion of the past found its spiritual certitudes, its religious realities, in terms of the life and thought that it knew, so must we seek in the forms of to-day's life for the credentials of the Divine, for the assurance of God. The virility of all religion is in the degree of its assimilation to the ideals and conditions of its times. If God spoke convincingly to a past civilization in terms of myth and fable congenial to that age, He will not fail to speak to us in terms of our ruling convictions of process and law which



have driven out the age of myths and superstitions. That these older forms of thought are but imperfectly atrophied is evident by the pagan proofs still offered of the deeds of God in the world. The physical miracle, the visible wonder, the capricious, the arbitrary, and the unusual are still offered as the supreme evidence of the divine activity. So true is this that the word "supernaturalism" has come to designate technically the type of thought which separates God from the world, and makes the token of his presence a miraculous occurrence. This type of explanation has shaped almost every traditional account of doctrine. The most cherished portions of our sacred books are those which speak of miraculous deeds, occurrences, experiences, — for these seem to us most certainly the credentials of the divine. Alas, we do not read the signs of the times. We still demand non-spiritual proofs of spiritual reality. Now these tokens do not function with our enlarging ideals of truth, our enlarging conceptions of a spiritual God. Supernaturalism, as the designation of the divine power and presence in the human,

we must indeed hold, or we emasculate religion and make it a by-word. But the reality of the supernatural activity, whether in the psychological or the social realm, or in the field of natural law, must not find its chief evidence in the miracle. We must not ask people to "turn aside" to witness burning bushes in order to convince them that they are on holy ground. The presence of God and the sacredness of life must be demonstrated to men in terms of to-day's life.

The philosophic mood which could conceive God best as transcendent, has given way to a mood which demands the vision of his immanence. Is it not within the power of our current convictions of the nature of reality to disclose God as a Living Fact? Is not our best thought our best instrument? Is scientific thought to be regarded as an enemy and not an ally of religious faith? It is, indeed, "becoming increasingly hard to believe in the miracle," and the evidence for to-day must function with the convictions of the men of to-day. An age trained on the one hand to seek for the manifestation of the divine in "super-



natural" tokens, and trained on the other to believe that law and order express the deepest nature of the world, stands confused before the religious problem of evidence. It is a pedagogical inconsistency, a rational blunder. The consequences are disastrous for those hearts which affirm the supernatural and crave the Divine, but whose understanding can make no place for the traditional account of the supernatural. The earnest thinkers of to-day are not atheists; they are believers in a great God. They are believing protestants against outgrown conceptions of God.


Process, law, righteousness, unselfish, loving service of fellow-men, — these are things which hold men's minds, the things in terms of which their deepest convictions of life are being shaped. Then surely the prophet of God must find the evidences of the supernatural in these things, and be able to convince the people of to-day that the Infinite touches our finite life in these things. *Religious certainty, religious reality, must be found in the things we are doing.* If we cannot convincingly show

- God at work in the life of society, then no volumes of "supernatural evidences" out of the past can create religious reality. Such is the concrete demand of the scientific habit of mind. It is a right demand.

To put this criticism and counsel in concrete terms, let us frankly say that we fail to *moralize* our theological thinking to keep pace with our best moral consciousness. When we talk to men about God, and do not speak to the deepest moral realities that possess the men of our day, can we speak with authority to our age? Will not thoughtful men say that we do not play the rules of the game in theological thinking?

For these elemental moral realities know nothing of cheap absolutions, of divine interventions in the moral process, of miraculous provisions to save men from consequences. Every system of spiritual "indulgences" is ethically and rationally vicious, and betrays the presence of mechanical thinking in religion. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" is a fundamental certitude, the condition

of awakening the consciousness of sin. No doctrine of God must tamper with that elemental moral conviction, but only interpret it. The habit of law, firmly fixed in the consciousness of to-day, is our ally and instrument to rebuke sin and establish righteousness. Men are not easily persuaded by religious doctrines which speak of a deity who transcends the moral law, or who abrogates it to save men from the consequences of their transgressions of law, or to lift them up to heavenly places. We know no God great enough to save men by a higher law than that of righteousness; men must be saved morally or not at all. God conceived in terms of this deep moral reality will speak with all of the authority of the divine to men. Men believe when we teach faithfully that the wages of sin is death, and that the wages will be promptly paid on pay-day. They believe when righteousness and love and service are worn as the badge of religion, and when they are taught to see in these things the deepest truths about God. For vital religion is a matter of ethics, and not etiquette, before God. If our religious doctrines can be



reinterpreted to make place for these moral realities, the consciousness of God will live again in the *moral passion*, and the old assurance of the divine presence will blaze forth with conquering might.

On the other hand, to dally with our best moral convictions, and to teach anything less than our best ethical insight dictates, is to trifle with the laws of religion. The passion for truth must control in theology as much as in any science. We preach
~ God not as an almighty solver of difficulties, but because we believe He is the great Fact. We preach salvation not to salve men's consciences, but because love and righteousness are the only solvent of the problem of sin. We preach immortality, not as "dope," an anæsthetic that will
~ enable us to comfort the sorrowing and the dying, but as the truth about the enduring nature of spiritual reality. Out of the depths of moral experience we must find the interpretation of religion which will bring the consciousness of God home with authority to the life of to-day. The enlarging conception must be moralized to keep pace with our best moral realities,

if we would solve the problem of religious effectiveness by revealing the Living God.

Thus the newer sense of law has done something to tone up religious thinking and lead it to deeper visions. The static attitude in theology, insisting that the old order is good enough, is giving way to a progressive insight which interprets God and his relationship to life in harmony with the moral realities which are convincing to the social consciousness of today. "The new righteousness," "social justice," "civic conscience," — these are modern terms pregnant with revealing power, and symptomatic of our enlarging moral vision. The sense of law is leading us to see that righteousness is neither a capricious affair, nor a by-product of the world. It cannot be "imputed" by any juggling with logic. It must be achieved, not bestowed. The ethical is not an optional department of life; it is a quality of all personal life. "Morality is not *in* the nature of things; it *is* the nature of things." The moral law is a cosmic law, underlying all life and law. And the path to religious reality is the path of moral

fidelity and obedience. The awakening of the moral passion is the condition of the vision that shall see God face to face.

That this is no academic problem, a sympathetic knowledge of our times must surely convince us. A diagnosis of the present situation reveals a widespread paralysis or inertness in religious life as it touches social problems. There are profound social movements, not without some moral purpose, which yet have not the powerful impulse of religious conviction behind them. There are industrial and economic developments which await the direction of higher meanings, which only religion can bring. Spiritual ministry to human need was never so magnificently organized as at present; but it awaits a dynamic passion, an inspiration commensurate with the task. Leadership of moral reform does not have the courage and majesty that come with the consciousness of "walking with the Almighty." The ethical has in too many instances descended to the plane of dull duty-doing, a "cold, hard moralism." Life itself, too often, has no outlook, no majestic setting, no com-

prehensive unity and goal great enough to lift it out of the commonplace, or even out of despair. The temporal has crowded out the sense of the eternal. The blight of secularism is upon our splendid modern life. Life is held too cheap. There are no inspirations large enough to fill life and labour with enthusiasm, zest, and power. The people are not working with a song, but with a sigh; not with praise, but with a protest. Life is not regarded as opportunity, but as something to be spent. Optimism, the mood that controls when men feel that the world is good at its centre, and that it is all pledged to the service of the human, — this fountain of abounding life has failed or run low, sustaining only a meagre spiritual life. Certain social forces are gathering, sullen and sinister, which no superficial treatment can allay.

The solution is the religious solution. God must be seen on the throne of the universe. Life must be seen as a Cause large enough to challenge the conquering spirit. The laws of life must be seen, not as hostile or neutral, but as God's way to reach the highest goal. Duty

must be interpreted as the will of the Living God. Work and service must be interpreted as the glory of God. Leadership must be able to cry, "Thus saith the Lord." The developments of modern life must be seen as the unfolding of the divine purpose. The moral and spiritual meanings of life must be felt in their sublimity, expressing the deepest law of the universe. Our spiritual leadership, like all great leadership — the leadership of Abraham, of Isaiah, of Jesus — must be exercised under the eye of God. We must be original seers, and not second-hand scribes. God is not a great Concept; He is the Great Toiler. As men of action, our wills must find God as Will, as Co-worker, as Co-sufferer, as Sharer in human life and work. God can be known as Present Help. Spiritual religion brings distinction and glory and power, — in short, redemption, — to our finite life, by linking it all in conscious coöperation with the Infinite Sympathy.

Our problem is, first, to teach an enlarging conception of God, helping people to conceive the divine in terms of the living ideals that control to-day's life; second, to teach

them to worship and pray, trusting life confidently to the Ancient of Days who manifested Himself in power in the faith of our fathers. The problem of religious effectiveness is ultimately that of establishing a warm, confident, living, strong relationship with the Author and Soul of all being, whose meaning and presence are found chiefly in the highest life of men. And the consequence will be that the ageless, quenchless truth of the inexhaustible divine will be at the service of the human, supplying us with the ideals, the courage, the companionship, and the power that we need to save life and bless it; and lifting all human effort up to the most effective plane of inspiration and achievement.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL METHOD

THE ideal of religion majestically commanding life and bringing every district of the human into loyal obedience to the divine is the ideal of every spiritual prophet, ancient or modern. We have shown that religion is relative to the regnant conceptions of God; hence better teaching about God is the condition of deepening the religious life. Our religious guides are the preachers and teachers who interpret spiritual reality to their age. And the conceptions of God and his relationship to us, in terms of which they speak, is theology. It does not augur well for the authority of religious teaching that theology and the theologians have fallen under suspicion.

The retirement of theology from its proud preëminence as "Queen of all the sciences," to its present status as a discredited science, finds its explanation in the failure of the-

ology to observe the laws of a living science. So long as religious doctrines were regarded as divine formulæ to be received on authority, the throne of theology was secure. But since the scientific habit has become general, the dogmatic method of interpreting religious truth has lost its convincing power.

The present confusion in theology is due to the fact that the adjustment is far from complete or universal. The older ideals of religious interpretation are still current in large districts of life. On the other hand, an increasing number of leaders are endeavouring to interpret religion with the same freedom that prevails in the work of other sciences. Meanwhile the church as a whole is thrown into some confusion. With varying degrees of confidence the membership of the churches rally about the standards of the "New" or the "Old," with an indefinite idea of the real issue involved. And these divided camps are largely administered to by clerical teachers who offer a "mediating theology," or who avow that their emphasis is wholly religious and not theological! These latter posi-

tions are at best but a *modus vivendi*, and not a stable condition. It is evident that the critical problem of religious leadership has to do with the ideals and methods of religious interpretation. How shall we gain true and satisfying conceptions of God in his relationship to life? What are our tests of truth in the realm of religion? Doctrinal skirmishes and recriminations concerning "radical" and "conservative" do not really touch the root of the matter.

— "To the thinking man a discord between methods is a graver matter than an opposition between doctrines." If we are to understand the fundamental issues involved, we must understand the older ideal and the newer, the older and the newer method of thinking. With the object of clarifying principles and disclosing the nature of the theological Babel, we undertake to exhibit here the parallelism between traditional orthodoxy and modern theology, — using these latter terms not to designate an arbitrary classification of theologians, but the contrast of principles of method.

— The contrast throughout is founded upon the discord between the static conception

of life and the world which prevailed until far into the nineteenth century, and an evolutionary or growing conception of life and the world which holds men's minds to-day and pervades every field of our thinking. The units of the older world of thought were conceived as fixed "essence." The units of our modern thinking are elastic, growing things. For the technical student of thought it is doubtless sufficient to say that the difference that we are characterizing is the difference which the discovery of the evolutionary conception and its application to life has wrought. Darwin is the father of the discord. Profoundly interpreted, evolution is indeed the key to our problem; but not evolution as popularly conceived, nor evolution as an hypothesis of natural science, nor — least of all — as a philosophical dogma. Evolution as a statement of that whole radical transformation of our method of thinking which marks the emergence of modern thought is indeed the key to our whole problem. But the term is likely to be only a verbal explanation, or to offer only a shallow interpretation. It is therefore

necessary to characterize concretely the far-reaching implications of the evolutionary method as a new insight into meaning, a new and pregnant principle with which thought operates in every realm.

The key to the true understanding of the modern world of thought is in the hand of — the man who has mastered the meaning of law, process, growth. In the field of — natural science the biological method has yielded immense fruitage. The law of life is growth. Everything that lives, grows. In the field of organic life the application of the principle is fairly clear. We study a plant or a tree in terms of its law of development. Likewise with animal life, we are concerned with the laws of growth. This is perfectly clear when applied to the individual. But natural science has carried with fruitfulness the application of the principle of growth to the group of individuals. Our classifications into groups and species express not fixity, but development.


In the inorganic world science is controlled by similar ideals. Geology discovers — that the earth itself has developed and is developing. Astronomy affirms not

only a moving world, but age-long, advancing processes everywhere. This is a growing universe. The old rigidity and finality are dispelled.

But the real significance of the newer insight is not seen until the genetic method is applied to the study of humanity. Man's world is a growing thing; and man himself, studied as an individual, in groups, or as a genus, expresses development and not fixity. Anthropology, psychology, sociology, all deal with elastic, moving facts, not with static facts. And thus this principle of insight is brought to a man's moral world, his religious world, his rational world; and under the scrutiny of this newer method it is all seen as a moving, advancing process. Religion, whether in the race or in the individual, grows from the zero point to its best estate by a progressive process. The moral life awakens and grows from more to more. And even intelligence itself is everywhere an advancing fact, not a constant quantity. The effort to fix this complex, moving fact by a name, as "human nature," is delusive. We conceal the movement thus under a mental conception

that seems to form a fixed point in the flux. The older, abstract units of thought, such as "moral agent," "responsibility," "freedom," "religion," are all seen to have fluent rather than fixed meanings in their practical application. None of these things are constant, but growing quantities. We must learn to think not only a man's objective world, but also his subjective world, — his units of thought and the thinker himself, — as moving, growing facts, expressing a process proceeding by inviolable laws.


Still the real significance for theology of this changed method is likely to be misapprehended. It is a shallow view which assumes that the real trouble with the evolutionary principle in theology is that it makes creation always a process as against the fiat-conception of Genesis. That science affirms that worlds have been evolved, while the Bible says that God created them; or that science affirms the evolution of man, while Genesis declares that God placed him ready-made in a ready-made world, — this is only the fringe of the problem and really does not



touch its implications. It is the thorough-going antithesis of the modern sense of the relativity of meanings to the older sense of the absoluteness of meanings which makes the situation acute. It involves the recognition that our most sacred doctrines, expressing our most confident and catholic beliefs about spiritual realities, have been experimentally achieved, and must be experimentally interpreted. Constructive work in theology must proceed upon a clear grasp of the situation and a deliberate adoption of the principle which actually underlies our own world of thought. Thus only can we find a real point of contact between our theology and the thinking of the people.

Concrete illustrations of the discord between methods are familiar to all who touch the field of theology. They occur at every stage and phase of the work. The traditional theology, formulated in the spirit of a static interpretation, protests against change. Her formulations are canonized and sacred. Modern theology says that the very life and efficiency of theology is in adjustment to the changing demands of

life and of thought. Traditional theology conceives the Bible as the final message to the world. Modern theology regards the Bible as a faithful record of a growing and endless message. Traditional theology conceives the Bible as "inerrant" or "infallible," and reluctantly admits the function of criticism. Modern theology conceives the Bible as the richest of many sources of practical guidance, and welcomes all the light of research. Traditional theology regards revelation as a constant quantity, an *absolutum*, either coextensive with the Bible or contained therein. The business of exegete and expositor is to discover and construe this absolute content. Modern theology conceives revelation simply as what is actually revealed of God. Again, in the matter of doctrine, traditional theology regards the Bible as the "documented revelation of God to man," and the task of theology is "the ascertainment, formulation, and systematization of the truth thus communicated." Modern theology, on the other hand, seeks no such *quantum* which it can formulate and systematize. It regards biblical accounts of



doctrine as solutions which prophets of the past have offered for the perennial problems of life. It studies these not as finalities, but in their roots and their fruits. Traditional theology regards Jesus as the oracle whose recorded word is the touchstone of theology. Hence the proof-text method prevails. Modern theology regards Jesus as personality, the spirit of truth whose spirit — whose outlook on the spiritual — is indeed the test of all theology. But texts must be subordinated to the spirit that speaks through them. Literalism gives place to true spiritualism. In a word, traditional theology moves in a world of absolute conceptions, searching an absolute Bible for an absolute revelation. Its ideal is an absolutely valid and permanent theology. Modern theology conceives its task in utterly different spirit. Theology is an ever growing science searching for all evidences of God's ways with men, all revelations of the Holy Spirit in experience and history. And it seeks so to interpret this revelation for every age and every man that it shall come with the freshness and force of God's word.

The traditional method starts with a body of truth accepted as absolute, and proceeds deductively. The modern method starts with experience and history, and proceeds inductively. Apriorism is the key to traditionalism. Empiricism is the key to the modern method. According to the traditional method the Bible, or some revelation contained in the Bible, constitutes an unchanging standard of theological truth. For the modern method the Bible and its teaching, so far as we can apprehend it, are not finalities but registers of human experience and conviction. For traditional theology, revelation has to do with statements; for modern theology, revelation has to do with insight, meanings.

Traditional theology has held aloof from other sciences and has grudgingly conceded their advance, feeling that many scientific discoveries were inimical to religion. Consistent with its presupposition of a unique, absolute standard of truth, traditional theology has felt obliged to defend her dogmas, and has only reluctantly yielded at certain points where scientific criticism has compelled it. Volumes of

apologetics have been written whose burden is this: "Even though we have been routed from our ancient stronghold, scientific method cannot reach this new citadel of faith. Here is a reserved district where criticism cannot enter!" Thus miracles ✓ are a strong bulwark of traditional theology for the reason that they are inexplicable. Modern method, on the other hand, has joined hands with every scientific spirit and has been eager for light from every quarter. For the modern method has essayed to put theology upon a common basis with every other true science, in that it shall be empirical, inductive, and fearlessly face the facts. It only asks for a proper limitation of its field, and for tests of truth appropriate to its subject-matter.

Thus, while traditional method is occupied largely with defences and with justifying the old standards, modern method is studying how to make real to men of to-day the vital message of Christianity. Consistency and system is the central aim of the one; reality and effectiveness is the aim of the other.

To the traditional method a divine

revelation is like Melchizedek, without pedigree or descent ; to the modern method, revelation is like a well-born child, rich in ancestry and potential of unborn truth.

— For the one, discontinuity is the mark of divine revelation ; for the other, continuity is the test of truth. It follows that traditional method commonly insists upon the distinction between the natural and the supernatural order. The modern method in theology either obliterates this distinction or gives the terms new significance.

The security and certainty of the traditional method is in the assumption of a fixed standard to which every teaching is brought to be measured. Freedom of thought is the test of any modern theology. Therefore the method of authority which is the ruling ideal of traditional theology cannot be retained entire or in part by one who frankly concedes the truth of the modern position. Spiritual truth is tested by the experimental method, and not by the dogmatic. The incompatibility is complete at this point.

Emerging from this study of the funda-

mental contrast of method and spirit, there must be apparent a conflict of ethical ideals. The modern method regards traditional theology as "stand-patism" in religion. The latter regards modern method as "insurgency." The traditional method calls the modern lawless and disloyal to the true standards, while the latter professes to be moved by a great moral awakening! It is a phase of the old alignment of loyalist or patriot. It is the contrast that is repeated in the clashing ideals of politics to-day. The politician's quarrel over the function of the Constitution of the United States is repeated in the theologian's quarrel over the function of the Bible. A moral issue is at stake here. Ultraconservatism in theology is but a special phase of the conservative spirit which rebukes every eager effort for progress and social reform with the plea that "it will disturb business." The ethical value of progressive social leadership as over against complacency with the established order is not yet clearly recognized. Ultraconservatism, whether in politics or in churches, must be treated as an ethical symptom.

The modern method in theology claims to be but fulfilling the moral logic of the Reformation. It rejects fixed authority as a religious guide, and trusts the revelation that comes in the highest experiences of the race. It scornfully declines to take advantage of "half-fare permits to the clergy" in theological thinking. For it is this very fallacy of special privilege that Luther struggled against. Moreover, the scientific spirit has accentuated the essential dishonesty of claiming rational exemptions or privileges for theologians. No marvel or miracle must be made to do service for integrity of thinking. Here is a very real ethical problem involved in our thought-method, which is more apparent to the scientist than to the ecclesiastic.

And now when the issue is squarely seen and felt between the modern method and the traditional, many a thoughtful student asks in dismay: "but if there are no absolute standards in our approach to the Bible and Christianity, how can we be absolutely certain of the line between the true and the false in religious explanation? Where are the old, secure units of thought?"


The answer lies at hand. The "absolute certainty," in the sense meant, has disappeared with the other absolutes of the older method. Religion has no arbitrary external standard of certainty. With all other true sciences theology comes back to the tests of intelligence and the verification of experience. Independent "proofs" we have none. Are we "absolutely certain" of our conclusions in chemistry or in ethics? The question is academic. Practically, we can affirm no such infallible standards. "For certainty in concrete things is a matter of life rather than of speculation."

In view of the instinctive protest that arises here from those who feel that this is dismissing the whole matter of truth with an airy wave of the hand, or at least making it a purely subjective and relative matter, we point out that this apprehension arises from false inference as to the consequences of method. The earth is as real and solid since we have discovered that it whirls in space and is among the smallest of a universe of worlds, as it was when people regarded it as "fixed" and flat and lonely. Neither does any atomic theory or theory

of electrons undermine our confidence in the security of things. The recognition of movement does not affect the essential stability of things, — it only interprets that stability. So in religious explanation we need only to note the actual security of the realities involved, and adjust our preconceived notions to the newer insight.

And in any case we cannot restore the Ptolemaic conception of the human world as static. Our world of mind and morals and religion "does move," though it is controlled by laws as faithful as God himself! Our security, like that of all legitimate explanation, rests upon the assumption that this is an "honest world." The movements of life are not lawless. Security lies in mastering and obeying the laws of life, rational and spiritual. Theology assumes the veracity of the religious world, though it cannot "prove" its right to its assumption.

Turning now from the consideration of this fundamental discord, which we regard as the real crux of the present confusion, we call attention to a principle of philosophic



discrimination too often neglected in religious interpretation.

Any really consistent and fruitful thinking is controlled by a view of the world which involves certain presuppositions, a certain large view of the meaning of life, and a corresponding ideal of philosophic method. Thus the great philosophies fall into distinct types according to these presuppositions upon which they rest. For freedom in philosophic thinking can only mean freedom to be absolutely faithful to controlling principles. "Freedom of thought," in the sense of lawless or unprincipled thinking, is unreason. Now it follows that certain types of philosophic method, proceeding from presuppositions which are inimical to religion itself, are valueless or confusing when applied to religious problems. For example, an avowed atheistic philosophy of life could not consistently expound religion based upon theism. There are many present-day currents of thought which are implicitly materialistic, atheistic, or thoroughly agnostic of religious values. When a man controlled by such a philosophy enters the

field of theology, whether as exegete, expositor, or systematic formulator of theology, his findings have a qualified value. They must always be estimated upon the background of the theorist's implicit assumptions. Christianity is not consistent with any and all philosophies, and the failure to heed this truth has produced a great number of bizarre and valueless volumes of so-called "scientific" treatment of the Bible and of Christianity. If thinking is to be consequent, it must be consistent; and there is no such thing as a disinterested or colourless attitude in philosophy. The thinker is always committed to something, and his thinking will have this element of relativity. So in the matter of theological method in general, the work of exegetes and theologians should be examined in their fundamental, controlling principles and not in their surface utterances. Some very keen and able men are disqualified for the work under consideration.

We merely point out here some of the currents of thought which neutralize the value of religious explanation when they are in control, for the reason that they

carry assumptions which undermine the values to which religion is committed.

1. First of all, there is a false naturalism which sometimes busies itself with religious problems. Naturalism is the type of philosophy, based upon the analogy of the method of natural science, which explains all things in terms of genesis and process. It "functions" so easily with the social consciousness of to-day that it is capable of easy perversion. It might be characterized as the anatomical study of personal and social phenomena. This naturalistic study of phenomena in terms of beginnings and processes does bring us a great insight. But the danger is in the false naturalism which says, in effect, that explanation in terms of process is the full account of things. Anatomy is the last word. This attitude is familiar to students in the field of religion; but it is a barren attitude, for it stops short of those meanings and values of religion which give it worth and warmth and power.

2. There is a current form of abstract idealism in philosophy which perpetuates the myopic vision of the old rationalism and treats all problems in a transcendental

spirit. Many of the religious fads of our day are examples of this type of treatment. Caring more for the articulations of abstract speculation than for the articulations of life, explanations of this type often deal in airy and pretentious styles of philosophic architecture which appeal to the pride of the half-educated. The weakness of this type of philosophy is that the demands of life and experience are overlooked in the abstract and vague effort to reach some supposed logical demand. Moral distinctions are levelled, and the thread of reality is snapped, when religion commits itself to these abstractions.

3. There is a curious blending of the method of naturalism and that of abstract idealism in a popular exegetical or historical movement widely current to-day. This is the attempt to "explain" a doctrine or a man or a movement by a process of analysis which ultimately brings the object sought to the vanishing point. Under the guise of pursuing an "historical method" it makes abstract idealism its directive principle, and by a process of refinement, of casting out everything that can be "ac-

counted for" by the laws of development, it essays to reach a sediment, an "irreducible minimum" of truth with which it can operate. We are familiar with the attempts made in this spirit to discover the "essence of Christianity" or the "pure gospel."


4. Again, there is a movement of thought that expresses an overdone principle of empiricism. The pragmatic method expresses the psychological emphasis of the age. But an excessive pragmatism, which renounces all ideal values and makes the test of truth to be merely the demands of the hour, is likely to overlook all the forces that stand above actual life and command it. Thought itself becomes an invertebrate, molluscous thing when it thus repeats the old positivism and makes the actual order the measure of truth.

Thus we might attempt to pick out the philosophic currents and cross-currents which go to make up the mental world of a given age, and we might profitably attempt to distinguish currents from the tidal movements in which all men seem to think together. We make here this partial analysis not in the interest of a thorough-

going criticism or condemnation; we only point out that *a philosophic method which is sceptical or agnostic at its roots or in its fundamental principles must inevitably repeat its scepticisms in its formulated account of life and religion.* So far to transcend differences of method as justly to estimate them all in their limitations as well as in their fruitfulness, is the real goal of philosophic insight. Only as a theologian measurably attains to this power of rowing against currents can he be other than the helpless victim of a prevailing current or Zeitgeist. A theological student must understand the rationale of the movements of thought that surround him, and thus be able discriminatingly to assess the value of his own logic and his own conclusion.

A concrete statement of some of the more important positive constructive principles may serve as a working outline of modern theological method.

First. — Theology and religion must not be treated as identical. Religion is the great human fact that expresses the soul's life illuminated and controlled by the vision



of the divine. Theology is the mind's interpretation of this primal fact of life. Theology thus becomes purely instrumental and secondary to religion.


Secondly. — As a human fact, religion is not a constant quantity in any save a conceptual sense. It is a growing fact, responsive to the whole complex, growing life of a man. Theology, the intellectual interpretation of religion, must not only take account of this incessant movement of the human spirit and its response to its vision of God; but itself, as our thought about religion, is subject to the laws of thought. This inevitably means that there will be change, development, in our interpretation of religion. Theology cannot be a constant quantity to be handed out to succeeding generations of thinkers; in a living race or a living man it outgrows all arbitrary standards.

The historical study of doctrine thus becomes a first principle of theological method. Every Christian doctrine must be interpreted in the light of its history. The real meaning of the doctrine must have regard not only for its origin but for its development and goal. Jesus exemplified this

principle in his demand for "fulfilment" of inherited truths.

We must recognize that the ruling conceptions of any age — its science, its philosophy, and its whole outlook upon life — are inevitably reflected in its thinking and shape its doctrinal interpretations. As these conceptions grow or change from age to age with the growth of society, we must learn to discriminate between the abiding truth of a doctrine and its age-form. For every great theology may be regarded as the answer which a given man or a given age gave to these religious questions that come to us all. Thus the great creeds and symbols of the church become landmarks, monuments, rich revelations of truth to guide us. But a creed or a doctrinal statement cannot become a fixed standard. It is a witness to a spiritual reality; not the living reality itself.

On the other hand, this principle of relativity has some vital consequences for constructive theology to-day. Our accepted conceptions of the world must find sympathetic understanding in the terms of our theological thought. For our own



"ruling conceptions" must be the vehicles of the spiritual message to us. Anachronisms may not be untrue, but they are inadequate to produce conviction. Thus such conceptions as law, development, immaturity, socialism, and the like must be the Spirit's instrument to us. Hence the theologian must know the "social consciousness" of his own time as well as of past ages. To an age which is scientific, democratic, social, ethical, in its deepest consciousness, we must not urge religious conceptions which run athwart these convictions. Theology must not only be moralized anew, but it must be democratized and socialized. In these great human movements which express the progress of the race, men must find God and his will revealed. As life grows and progresses, the living touch with God can be maintained only by rediscovering God and reinterpreting Him in the life that we know. The deepening and enrichment of life expressed by the advance of the ethical and social sciences, as well as all awakening of humanitarian feeling and ministry, is at the service of those who would interpret God.

Thirdly. — This principle of growth and development must be applied to the biblical record precisely as to any other record of human experience. The scholar has the same rights of investigation and criticism in the biblical record as in any other. We may not canonize any standard as an *absolutum* of truth. Nowhere are the respective angles of approach of the traditional and the modern student of religion more radically contrasted than here.

The contention for an "infallible rule of faith" which characterized the traditional demand for a directive standard in theology, we must metamorphose into the forms of verification or tests of truth recognized by modern thinking. The synthesis of experience, history, and reason forms the tribunal where our certainties are tested. Thus theology takes its place among the sciences. It is no truer than they; but it is as true, and the theologian's passion for truth finds scientific satisfaction. Truth lies in the maintaining of balance in the application of our tests of truth. An overemphasis upon experience results in mysticism; an overemphasis upon history results in a false natural-

ism ; an overemphasis upon reason results in rationalism. Each expresses an excess.

Fourthly. — Christian theology interprets the type of spiritual life and experience which Jesus Christ created and of which He is the supreme revelation and standard. Christian theology, therefore, is the type of religious interpretation which always comes back to the spirit of Jesus Christ for its final test. It stands or falls with the test of the spiritual ideal which He incarnated in His character and conduct. And we must come back again and again to the concrete historical Jesus and His gospel to measure and test the spirit of the living Christ whose guidance within us is our supreme wisdom.

To summarize : the task of Christian theology is to learn the Christian gospel of the spiritual life in the fullest and clearest way in which it has been revealed — in Jesus Christ, and in all experience and history as the context of Jesus and His gospel — and then to find the vehicle for the expression of thought which shall bring to living men Jesus' sense of a living message from the Living God.

CHAPTER III

THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE METHOD

TRADITIONAL theology has sought to formulate religious truth in final, changeless propositions, giving it mathematical precision. In the preceding chapter we have shown that modern theology is controlled by a principle of insight which displaces this static method by recognizing the essentially progressive and developing nature of all the vital factors involved. Among these factors concerned in theological interpretation are language, thought, and personality. The sciences of philology, epistemology, and psychology, all witness to the living, developing nature of religious explanation. We must attend now more specifically to the testimony of these branches of human knowledge.

I. *The Argument from Language*

A study of the nature of language brings convincing evidence of the evils which grow

out of the attempt to rest in fixed formulas of truth, and reveals the necessity of constant restatement in order to serve the demands of life. Language is purely instrumental. It is called into being to serve the needs of thought. Its value is in proportion to its adequacy in performing this function. To symbolize and communicate our characteristic human experiences, we create language. Primitive life has very primitive language; developed life has highly developed language, coming ever to more exact and concrete forms of expression. But the purely instrumental nature of language is not done away with simply because it has become a better instrument. A language which no longer grows to express growing need, thereby becomes a "dead language." Life must ever find expression in living, growing language.

Now the close relationship between language and meaning and our failure to make legitimate distinction, results always in some form of literalism. Literalism is the blunder of resting in the symbol and not pressing back to the thing symbolized.

The letter takes the place of the spirit. Literalism is always threatening us, whether in the realm of theory or of practice. It is always a hurtful, deadening tendency; but it grows up so naturally out of the processes of human development and commends itself so insidiously and plausibly, that we often fall victims to one of its forms even while in the act of protesting against another form. Literalism, legalism, dogmatism, formalism, — they all belong to the same brood. They all mistake a form of expression for the deeper facts symbolized.

In the realm of conduct, the fallacy of religious formalism and legalism is apparent enough. The evil consists in resting in forms, — mistaking the expression for the thing expressed. It results in a form of deceit, in which we are defrauded of the content. Hypocrisy and all shams of life and character we universally condemn. But in the domain of thought and speech, there are subtle evils of linguistic usage that sometimes deceive us simply because we do not analyze them and perceive their superficial character. This relativity of

language can be best exhibited by pointing out one or two aspects that inhere in its very genesis and structure.

Life itself begins on the animal plane and only gradually develops to its higher aspects. We are animals before we are moral personalities and worshippers. That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural: afterward that which is spiritual. Our language, however, is formed on the sense-plane to meet our sense-needs and to express sensuous conceptions. As life comes to a higher plane we use these same words and forms of speech, metaphorically, in speaking of spiritual things. The result is that by means of the pedigree of language we sometimes drag in materialistic and sense implications, where the intent of the language is purely spiritual. Only incessant criticism and discrimination can save us from crude and hurtful inferences suggested by word origins.

The practical sense of inner dualism which the apostle Paul discovered within himself is repeated in the moral experience of us all. The natural, the material, the sensual, is always present, a part of our

experience, wooing us from the spiritual. The very reality of the spiritual is constantly questioned, in the overwhelming sense of the natural, which ever environs. And here our speech subtly betrays us. Our language — the very words that we use and the structure of our rhetoric — is constantly reënforcing the spontaneous impression of the superior reality of the natural, and thus betraying us into the attitude of sceptics toward the spiritual.

Even our most poetic speech betrays this sense-origin. The religious man speaks of a "high" moral attainment, or the "depths" of sin; and thus uses words with a space implication for conceptions that are non-spatial. So with "God in us," the "pouring out" of the Spirit, or the moral "fall" of a life. Even "inspiration" and "aspiration" have a primary physical reference, with a spiritual intention. We express meanings that are incommensurate with our words. The language of religion is thus necessarily symbolical and metaphorical. In dealing with the deeper meanings of the spirit, men deliberately employ words which betray their natural origin,


and assume that their hearers will not rest in the lower meanings expressed, but will go on to the higher meanings implied. That is, we commonly assume the activity of a personal response that goes quite beyond our speech. Men who live on lower levels will not understand the language. If they take it literally, they lose all the higher meanings. If they may not thus take it literally, they will say that it is the language of some unreality. Thus literalism is ever threatening spiritualism because our etymology seems to offer a solid basis in the substantial, natural order. Our imagery fails to kindle the vision. Language becomes an implicit argument against the reality of the spiritual world, since the hearer rests in the pedigree of the word and not in its intent. All of this but illustrates the peril of trying to establish final and "absolute" standards of religious faith and revelation in a medium of written and spoken language. The zeal of many an orthodox "defender" of the faith is unconsciously expended in the form of literalism.

But apart from this materialistic reference there is a persistent mechanical


literalism in biblical interpretation that seems to defy all of the common rules of intelligence and dwells in figures of speech rather than in meaning. It comes armed with grammars and dictionaries and canons and infallible rules and wrests the Scriptures to the destruction of all spiritual ideals. The language of metaphor is hardened into literal statement, and the spirit escapes in the insistence upon the letter. Here the danger is mechanical rather than material. The only escape is to remember — that the invisible things of the spirit can find no language but that of metaphor. When unspeakable things must be spoken, we find the best symbol that we can, and we trust the hearer to note that our language is that of metaphor and not of metaphysics. Our thought perceives similarities between the picture we use and the unpicturable reality. We hope to stimulate like thoughts in the mind of the reader or hearer, and trust him to pass from the picture or symbol to that other thing symbolized. In this complex mental activity there are opportunities for thought to lose its way. Forgetting that words are

counters to symbolize reality, the mind is prone to rest in the words or symbols; and dulness, or indolence, or the shallowness and carelessness of popular thought easily acquiesces in what seems an obvious or concrete meaning. Thus figures of speech are allowed to do duty as a final account of reality. What began as legitimate symbolism ends in metaphysics!

The gist of much theological folly is found in this failure to pass from the symbol to the thing symbolized. Our exegesis has often been an exegesis of metaphors and not of meanings. The crassest or even immoral meanings have been tortured from the Bible by methods of exegesis that show no comprehension of the instrumental nature of language and little spiritual insight. Excessive reverence for "The Word of God" has dulled our vision of the meaning of the Word of God. We have so worshipped the letter that it has ceased to be a vehicle to us of truth that passeth utterance. The history of popular biblical interpretation is full of this literalistic tendency, leading to all manner of absurdities and fanaticisms. And even in the realm of



learned exposition a species of literalism has often concealed the deepest truths. Metaphorical allusions of biblical writers to criminal law, to commercial usage, and to now long out-grown ideals of feudal or absolute government and primitive justice have been allowed to dominate Christian theology until now. Thus employed, the "Cross," the "Blood of Christ," "Sacrifice," "Redemption," "Salvation," and the vital imagery of the living truth graphically set forth in our Bible, result in superficial travesties of the inner meanings which command men and bless them. The history of every Christian doctrine affords illustration of the failure adequately to discriminate meaning from metaphor. The "Fatherhood" of God and the "Sonship" of Jesus Christ are examples of fundamental conceptions of the Christian faith which in both learned treatises and popular usage exhibit a mixture of metaphor and metaphysics. The necessity of mentally wrestling with these problems is likely to prove a "means of grace" in that such mental effort compels us to press into the deeper inner meaning of the terms. For God's



blessed meanings must come fresh and new to every generation, to every individual man as we wrestle with the perennial problems of religion. The pruning of the Bible texts which modern criticism has accomplished has practical justification, if it has so far shocked us out of a species of orthodox literalism that we gain a new sense of the immediacy of God's message.


Thus again does the relative and instrumental nature of language illustrate the necessity of relaxing the rigid and static treatment of any literary work as an "infallible rule" of life, or as containing an "absolute" content that can be codified or reduced to a constant content always equal to itself. Growth, development, fluency, and relativity are characteristic of the language in which we must express our highest truth. Both Bible exegetes and theology-makers may profitably shape their methods by the clear implication of language as relative and instrumental.

II. *The Argument from the Laws of Thought*

Back of speech lies the mental activity of which language is the symbol. Will an

examination of thought reveal constants which justify absolute standards of religious interpretation?

One of the first regulative conceptions that meets us to-day in analyzing our thoughts about things is the conviction that our very explanations are instrumental to the larger facts of life as experienced. Our best explanations are not ends in themselves, but they are in the service of a larger need; namely, the satisfaction of the personal ideals of existence. The intellect is active and constructive, not passive. Thought is teleological; logic is instrumental. To forget this teleological aspect of thought is to fall into abstractions and rationalisms. The student who makes his study and explanation to be the ultimate ends of life has inverted this principle, and has defeated the ends of education. "Truth for its own sake" and the "disinterested search for truth" are abstract ideals of mental method which after all are not justified by the nature of intelligence. All fruitful thinking has implicit reference to self-preservation in the completest sense. The driving principle of thinking is the



satisfaction which it administers to the personal life as a whole, not the mechanical necessity of some "logical reason" which grinds out logical finalities. The will to know lies behind all fruitful knowing; and thus the essentially volitional and ethical root of our "disinterested" mental accounts of reality is revealed. A certain relativity in thinking is forced upon us, — a personal equation which we cannot eliminate. Happily this is emerging into clearer light in our popular educational methods. Our best educators are coming to see that education cannot be a purely intellectual discipline. Intellect is not a compartment of life, but a living function of life. Educational ideals are coming more and more to recognize the necessity of educating the whole personality. Sound pedagogy recognizes the self-defeating nature of methods that aim at "intellectual development," oblivious to the organic nature of mind in which will and intellect, character and thought, are reciprocally bound in the unity of a living whole. Ethical and religious considerations condition the educator's problem, even in public schools. The

idealistic and "practical" aspects of education cannot be arbitrarily separated as in the past. Self-realization is an ideal which is at least implicit in all right educational method.

Now this teleological and instrumental nature of explanation has consequences for theological method. Thinking as a teleological activity of mind is a very different thing from thinking viewed as the impersonal and necessary transcript of the "Divine Reason." The governing ideal of "pure logic" seeking irrefutable and independent proofs of the fundamental truths of religion gives way to the vital and almost infinitely versatile efforts of living intelligence to comprehend and construe the realities of experience. Apriorism gives way to empiricism. New methods of thought and explanation are dispelling the rigidities of the older intellectualism and replacing them with the growing insights of living intelligence. A static epistemology gives place to the insights of developing consciousness.

The shortcomings of the static "logical truths" of the older philosophies is suffi-

ciently illustrated by the ravages of logical abstractions in most of the older theologies. Not recognizing the living nature of thought-activities, the forms or units of thinking were allowed to harden into rigid finalities. Forms created by the mind to serve its needs were uncritically allowed to tyrannize over the mind itself. This was particularly the case with generalizations which the mind constructs to symbolize the universals and the principles which it formulates in order to manage its problems. The generalizing habit is characteristic of mental activity. These generalizations are constructions of the mind which serve, instrumentally, the purposes of thought. But when they are not seen in their teleological nature, but are broken from their functional connections and allowed to harden into final realities, they misrepresent reality. They become abstractions. The resulting philosophy is abstract and academic, and, to this extent, beside the mark. Thought grows arrogant and arbitrary and dogmatic.

This is a leading characteristic of most intellectualism, and it is the besetting

fallacy of the scholastic philosophies, in the atmosphere of which most of our orthodox theologies were formulated. The consequence of reading much of the traditional formulation of religious truth is to rebel at its unreality. Much of it is logically well reasoned and massive in scope and outline; but it constantly falls into the fallacy of allowing its thought-units to harden into rigid abstractions which do not truthfully serve the fluent purposes of life. Thus our theologies bristle with such abstractions as "Man," "Nature," "Sin," "Redemption," "Grace," "Love," "Salvation," and the like. In the same spirit these units of thought are constructed into formulas which are alleged to provide for all the religious needs of life. Somewhat after the manner of algebraic formulas these scholastic doctrines constructed of logical abstractions are offered for the understanding of the Christian way of life. Our present-day difficulty is in so far ridding ourselves of the abstract forms of the truth that its concrete application to specific needs will be apparent. The "sinner" needs to be "saved." But the

"sinner" is such an inconstant quantity, and "salvation" is such a varying need, that the spiritual formula does not illuminate adequately the real problem of saving the individual man. "Salvation" as a great abstraction, or even as a programme, has confused the preaching of Jesus' Gospel. Even the formula, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall be saved" has worked a very superficial and hurtful sort of result in history, when it has been regarded in this absolute sense, as an all-inclusive formula, without attending to insight into concrete meanings. Charlemagne "converted" and baptized the rebellious Saxons four successive times in response to their acquiescence in this formula. History is full of "conversions," individual and national, which expressed mere acquiescence in abstract and absolute formulas. The trouble was not with the truth of the formula, but in its failure to articulate into life's realities.

The only way to escape these ineffectual formulations of religious explanation is to abandon the static conception of thought which moves in terms of logical abstrac-

tions. And this is achieved as we perceive the fluent, developing nature of all our finite life, and the instrumental and functional nature of thought as aiming at living insight and vital ministry. Not logic as a closed rational system, nor explanation as a final statement of truth, is our ideal; but the best insight into life that intelligence can gain, and the best vital ministry to life that intelligence can offer. When the method is thus relaxed to fit the concrete pluralism of life, the rigid, absolute quality of a uniform, religious "salvation" for "sinners" gives place to the saving ministry required by concrete cases. The measure of need and the kind of need must inform and direct those who prescribe for the "salvation" of "lost" men. Theology must sensitively reflect all of this versatile religious experience if it is to render a concrete, practical service for life.

III. *The Argument from Psychological Laws*

But neither language nor thought can be understood in their essential nature except as we gain a consistent attitude

toward the ulterior problem of the Ego or Self. The confusion commonly begins in the psychology which explicitly or implicitly controls one's thinking. How shall we conceive the subject of the mental and spiritual life? Is personality a unity obtained by addition, a sum; or the living unity of self-consciousness and self-determination?

Religious interpretation is always keyed to one of two possible conceptions of explanation, the Mechanical or the Personal. In other words, psychology, the real starting-point of all systematic thinking, casts its shadow or its light ahead upon the whole philosophy which operates in its name. Mechanism and intelligence are two ideals of reason, mutually unassimilable in the last analysis. A psychology or conception of mind which makes personality a function of brain and nerves, denying identity, the power of free action, and making thought an "association" or movement of nerve-products, — has virtually adopted the mechanistic ideal of mind, however adroitly the adoption is concealed by figurative language and ambiguous terms. Op-

posed to this is the conception of mind as living spiritual organism, with original powers of thinking, willing, feeling, — vital forms of energy in which it manifests its own self-identity and unity. The soul with its native capacity of free insight is in this point of view the real irreducible unit. The self, realizing its nature in the experiences which we call personal, can be studied fruitfully from many viewpoints; but any lapse that forgets that mind is organic life and not passive mould threatens the student with the fallacies that beset mechanical thinking.

Discrimination in psychology is the more necessary, since in an age of natural science methods with their resultant naturalism, the insidious temptation is always with us to reduce everything to the familiar ideals of natural science, *i.e.* mechanism. The danger is the more threatening, too, because of the close connection between mental data on the one hand, and nervous organism on the other. An intimate parallelism exists. Nevertheless, the absolute identification of the mental and the physical orders cannot be accomplished. An ex-

cessive empiricism in dealing with mental data is likely to overlook the analytically determined conditions of mental life. The attempt to manage psychical problems from the physiological standpoint is essentially the mechanistic theory of mind. Consciousness is a unique fact, inexplicable in terms of anything else. It is active agent, and not merely passive recipient. It is a true source of spiritual energy.

Frankly accepting this conception of the subject of experience, certain consequences are seen to follow in our conceptions of interpretation and revelation. One of these consequences is that the tests of religious truth are enlarged to fit the profoundly complex and versatile nature of personality. Rationalism, mysticism, voluntarism, and every form of religious insight and confidence become, in this view, aspects of the inner certainty which intelligence seeks to win for itself. Each has a relative validity in its account of reality, and every form of knowledge will be evaluated according to the type of insight demanded by the individual.

With this insistence upon personality

as the original and inner energy of consciousness, the teleological nature of religious empiricism appears. Our religious — doctrines are largely achieved in life and not in logic. Thought, as we indicated in the last section, has a practical function and is not an end in itself. It is instrumental to this larger fact of personal life as it presents itself in experience. This concrete reference of all fruitful thinking is a generally accepted directive principle in philosophy to-day. Experience stands in its own right as reporting the nature of life and the world. The function of reflective thought is to aid, by criticising and rationally testing, the reports of experience. If thought forgets this instrumental and practical function in bringing satisfaction to the soul's life, and assumes to be an end in itself, it tyrannizes over life and issues in rationalisms and logical abstractions.

This is just what has happened in the ages in which philosophy has assumed to be a matter of "pure intellect." The presupposition of the magnitude and character of intelligence as organic has been overlooked.

Philosophy has forgotten its instrumental relation to life, and has produced "logical systems" with little regard for concrete reality. In such an age and in such a spirit theology has essayed to deal with religious certainty. She has buttressed it with demonstrative arguments and surrounded it with chains of logical reasoning. The aim has been to produce an "infallible rule of faith and practice" that could be worked and defended as a whole.

This seems an inversion of the order of life. Character, conduct, the quality of personality, enter into problems of religious belief. What we are and what our vital needs demand for their satisfaction determines pretty largely what we believe. Our creeds are not primarily matters of philosophy, but of life. The fullest life must be the ultimate testing-place of truth and untruth. It has been happily pointed out that we gain our conceptions of truth by the principle of "eminent domain." We enter into life in an act of vital experience, and thus affirm the "right of seizure" of such beliefs as are necessary to our experience and to the maintenance of our

highest life. Thus life produces belief, and belief responds to the demands of life and makes place for the best life. In this experienced correspondence with the environing, spiritual world, we have our deepest witness to the fundamental truth of our belief.

Again, the conception of mind as active provides for the original element in ethics. The essence of the highest morality is not merely imitation but creation. Ethical personality must win its moral world. The failure of mechanical ethics is apparent here. No universal mould of perfection is adequate to the ethical problem. To be moral in the highest reaches of the term is not merely to follow faithfully established rules of conduct; it is to have an insight into the progressive implications of moral living. Ethical life endures as "seeing the invisible." Morality is not a static affair. It involves progress, growth, fulfilment. There is a teleological element in moral insight. The progress of society roots in this original creative power of the soul. Any adequate interpretation of moral religion must heed this principle.

It is evident that this essentially original and versatile power of personality in its ethical experience has some implications for our treatment of Christian ethics, especially in the matter of our attitude toward the Bible as the "rule of faith and practice." To use other men's visions, ✓ to rest back upon moral truth already revealed, content only to defend it, — this is not the attitude of a great moral teacher or a great moral age. The passion to bring the life of the present under the authority of the expanding moral ideal is a characteristic of a great ethical conscience.

Moral passion always overflows the dogmas erected to outline its course. The task of Christian ethics is not only to ex- ✓ pound biblical visions, but to lead men to an original vision of God in the moral life of to-day. The stimulus of contact with the ancient seers should make seers of the men of to-day.

The quality of surprise, the "overflow" of new and profounder experiences, is a characteristic mark of the higher spiritual levels. The subtle impact of personality upon personality is the condition of true

ethical progress. Such guidance calls not only for patterns, but ideals; not rules, but pregnant principles; not systems of ethics, but persons. Spiritual life is a seed. It is ever pregnant with new forms of life. Jesus himself did not destroy the old order; neither did he repeat it. He "fulfilled" the old morality. He rebuked static orthodoxy. If we would follow Jesus, we must
→ pass from imitative to initiative moral living. History has amply proved that the Christian's Bible has an awakening and
✓ creative power for spiritual life. But the mechanical terminology of a "rule" fails to set forth this marvellous germinative dynamic of the Scriptures. Any external
→ authority, even an external divinity, is yet external. The divine works in us to will and to do. Religion can never be regarded as a mere copying process, — a sort of final etiquette. Rather, religion describes the whole endlessly varied fact of human history enacted under the inspiration of the divine and responding more or less consciously to the sense of the Eternal. Religion at its best is life, individual and social, interpreted and lived in the im-

mediate vision of the Living God, and controlled by instant response to the divine will. The ultimate place of control is spiritual personality in process of self-achievement. And the condition or instrument of this awakening and self-achievement is the social organism itself where personality inspires personality.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE METHOD

THE preceding chapter undertook to show analytically the inherent impossibility of a permanent theology, and pointed toward a conception of religious explanation which should express the endless growth and adjustment of human life. We have now to discuss the consequences of this method at certain points where its adoption involves somewhat radical divergence from the traditional conception of theology; namely, (1) in our attitude toward the church and its interpretations, (2) in our attitude toward the Bible, and (3) in our attitude toward Christ.

Broadly speaking, there are two fundamentally contrasted methods of treating
→ the abiding facts of Christianity. One has the advantage of being associated with primitive Christianity, and of being identified with the whole history until the present. It has the advantage which custom, senti-

ment, and venerable tradition bring. The other has the advantage of being more consonant with the modern method of thinking things, and of being in closer touch with forms of explanation which convey reality to men to-day.

The older way of thinking, associated with most orthodox interpretation, regards the Christian faith as "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints." It conceives revelation as a body of truth or doctrine found as a deposit in one historic age or geographical district. It is a "revelation" once for all given within a certain circumscribed body of people or within certain writings. Or, again, it is certain communications or items of information given through certain accredited agencies. It is a definite pattern of life, or an accredited oracle. It is a doctrine or revelation of truth which is to be endlessly repeated without losing its authority or its originally circumscribed identity. "The church is not an institution for the discovery of truth, but a body for the preservation and dissemination of truth once for all delivered." This is an admirable state-

ment of the view as held by a modern defender. Certain history, certain people, certain writings, are abruptly isolated from other history and literature, and are conceived as unique and unassimilable. The revelation is closed. According to this theory the spiritual authority for all history and all life after the unique period of revelation is to be found by reference to that period. The conceptions of the church, of the Bible, and of Christ as guiding facts are brought into some sort of harmony with this general outlook upon the source of Christian guidance. Generally speaking, we have a "sacred history" interpolated into a secular history for the express purpose of offering spiritual guidance.

It is important to note that this account of the facts is itself a theory, — an interpretation. Facts and theories of the facts must be disentangled by the student who sets himself seriously to the thought-problems involved. The newer way of thinking the facts is no more a theory than the older, — and no less a theory. It accepts and exalts the same facts as supreme sources

of guidance, — the church, the Bible, Christ! It offers a competing theory with the conviction that the older theory is untenable for modern thinking, and with the conviction that the abiding facts themselves are thus made efficient and compelling for the blessing of the life of to-day. In a word, this conception of the Christian facts ignores the arbitrary limits set by the older theory. The reality of the divine activity and revelation whether in the biblical history, in the church, or in Christ, are in no way questioned. But the modern man sees these realities in their setting in our human world with its relativities and its development. The arbitrary constants of the older thinking seem unreal, and the abrupt delimiting lines between an "original" content of divine manifestation and meaning, and any other manifestation, seem untrue to fact. The secular and the sacred, the divine and the human life, are legitimate distinctions for abstract thought, but not for the treatment of concrete history. The plastic, fluent, growing nature of human life contradicts a theory of religion that is shaped in terms of hard

and final lines. And the eager attitude toward life which longs to bring the whole, full truth of religious reality to the life of the present is chilled by the unreality and untruth of a relation to a Living God which must first be measured or standardized by reference to a past standard. Moreover, the conviction of progress as a distinctive characteristic of the best spiritual life is justified only by a theory of the facts which will bring the Bible and the church and the Christ into a present, living relationship with society, thus making life potentially as great now as ever it was. And so the result of the newer theory is to rediscover the greatness of Jesus for the life of to-day; to recognize the value of the Bible as a record of spiritual reality; and to reëxperience the life of God in the living church as the Holy Spirit of Guidance.

I. *[The Consequences for our Conception
of the Function of the Church and
Theology*

In the popular mind, religion and theology have grown together. The intellec-

tual account of the religious life is indiscriminately identified with the life which it interprets. The doctrine of the divine love is identified with the divine fact. The saving power of Christ is identified with a given theory of salvation or of atonement. The processes of salvation are commonly identified with a rigid psychological programme or theological process which is prescribed as the formula of all accredited personal religion. It has all been codified, and stamped with a certain sanctity and formality. The result is a stereotyped theology with a well-defined line of cleavage between the "radical" and the "conservative," the "safe" and the "dangerous," the "orthodox" and the "heterodox."

For the student of theology, the first task is to discriminate between religion and theology, between spiritual experience and the intellectual account of it. Religion is essentially a meaning, a message, a fact, a truth, an experience. Theology is the effort of the mind to explain and interpret this prior fact of religious life. Theology is always explanation, interpreta-

tion, the work of the intellect in the service of the deep experiences of life. As explanation, theology makes use of the current thought-forms of the time, and is controlled by the ruling conceptions of the age that formulates it. Thus while it is true that religion expresses the universal fact of man's spiritual relationship to God, theologies are definitely related to certain ages and certain races in that they employ thought-forms characteristic of those ages or those races. A given theology is the account which a given age or thinker offers of the religious problems encountered. A Hebrew prophet or Christian apostle wrestles with the perennial problems of life. The result of his thinking which he offers for the guidance and inspiration of his fellows becomes an inspired theology because it is manifestly born of a deep spiritual experience and insight. It inevitably bears the stamp of his times; otherwise it is not a convincing religious interpretation. This is equally true of Isaiah, of Paul, and of Augustine. Theologies, then, must be studied with this relative element in mind. The student

must understand the symbol, the conceptions employed to set forth religious reality. This necessitates a sympathetic understanding of the historic period in which the theology arose, and a knowledge of the influences which entered into the life and thought of the age. The sacred and worthwhile thing is the spiritual life which is symbolized ; not the interpretation of that spiritual life, however venerable and impressive. To accept even a great theology as the final account of religious truth is to substitute an intellectual orthodoxy for the creative moral activity of the spiritual life.

The significant line of cleavage among theologies to-day is not that between "conservative" and "radical," nor that between "new" and "old" as such ; but between the contrasted methods by which the theology is achieved. The significant concern is the way the task of theology is conceived and pursued rather than the formulation offered. Any "new" theology which fails to see this, simply offers a new competing orthodoxy. The "modern-minded man" sees the impossibility of resting in any orthodoxy, and frankly and freely adjusts

himself to the realities of life in his endeavour to interpret spiritual experience. His mental attitude is not that of "adopting" or defending any historic system of theology, however effective for its times and however well reasoned. He is left free rather to analyze every theology that is offered, with a twofold purpose in mind. First, he seeks to understand the religious consciousness of the people. Second, he seeks to understand why this particular symbol was employed to express that meaning. History is against the man who regards historic creeds as "fossils." They are fossils in the sense that a fossil is a memorial of a life once within the shell. History refutes the man who cynically toys with the shell and does not feel the authority of the religious life of which the shell is an impressive memorial. Superciliousness towards outgrown theologies usually conceals spiritual deadness. The great theologies and the great creeds and confessions are impressive witnesses and indispensable guides for the faith of our day. They are symbols of truths and realities and forces which have commanded ✓

human society from the beginning until now. The study of creeds should therefore conform to the biological method, not to the method of the antiquarian.

On the other hand, history is equally against the man who sets himself up as the champion of any orthodoxy. The relative element in his doctrinal statement is likely to conceal and defeat the ageless spiritual truth which it aims to set forth. Doctrinal and credal tests of spiritual truth are unreliable measures of religious reality. As between the formal "adoption" of outgrown theologies and the uncomprehending superciliousness toward them, there is little to choose. Neither attitude reveals the spiritual discernment which must condition all vital theological interpretation. Belief and faith cannot be formless. Intelligent people have some creed. On the other hand, intelligent people may not insist upon any form of doctrine as permanent and universal. The creed or the theology is true only so long as it adequately expresses and nourishes the spiritual life. Theology to-day is concerned with the whole history of the human search

after God, with its monumental creeds and theologies. It seeks to understand sympathetically the great affirmations of faith; to enter into the deepest experiences of our great spiritual leaders and teachers; to comprehend why creeds and theologies have assumed their successive historic forms. It seeks then to rethink and restate the truth about God in a way that shall convince men and arouse their passion and devotion. Although we may not repeat the formulations of the past, the continuity of life and thought makes it equally impossible that we should not build on the tested spiritual foundations. It is fatal to cut loose from the past. How to use the past — how to express the permanent message in altered thought-vehicles — is precisely the critical problem. We must not destroy, but fulfil. The present-day teacher of theology is free to seek the guidance of all who have struggled with the great problems of the soul. He should have a broad and sympathetic comprehension of the life of his own day, its thought-currents and spiritual needs. He should then be free — nay, he should be urgently

impelled — to interpret the spiritual message afresh for his generation, offering it as the solution of contemporary spiritual problems. He should be one with the passionate prophets of the past in that he strives to mediate the eternal to men; he will differ from the prophets of the past in that he deals with different social ideals and uses the speech and thought-forms of another age. He will teach that the great creeds are "High Places" where men have found the Living God, and the revelation of spiritual reality. To reënact spiritual reality to-day, — not necessarily to repeat the ancient creed, — is the substance of true worship. We must fashion our creed in terms of contemporary thought for the direction of the faith of to-day. This will involve the reinterpretation of every great doctrine of the Christian faith in consonance with the mental and moral ideals that express the best life of our times. Every great constructive religious age has faced anew the abiding problems of life, and wrested an answer from its deepest consciousness. The result is the "inspired theology" of that age. Our generation

cannot shirk the responsibility of facing the same problems, and of shaping our confident solutions in terms of the deepest currents of thought and life. The authoritative meanings of God must be brought home to contemporary men in terms of contemporary life.


II. *The Consequences for our Conception of the Function of the Bible*

Just as there has been a harmful tendency to identify theology and religion, so there has been a tendency to identify the Bible with the fact of revelation. As the intellectual formulation of religion in doctrinal statements has warped religion and defeated its spiritual end; so we may trace a parallel tendency in the uncritical use of the Christian Scriptures as an account of spiritual truth. In place of recognizing the purely instrumental nature of the biblical record to conduct us to the true object of worship, we have bestowed the worship upon the Bible itself. We have thought of our religious task as studying ✓ to "know the Bible"; defeating the real end of studying to "know God."

In all history the tendency to deify books, holy objects, holy places, is observable. Whatever has symbolized to men the presence or message of God has been uncritically identified with the dread Being symbolized. The Vedas, the Koran, the "Law" of the Hebrews, and the Christian Bible are cases in point. An imperfectly atrophied paganism persists even in our best Christian efforts to worship in spirit and in truth. The evil which Luther and the reformers, with true spiritual insight, inveighed against in the worship of "Holy Church" has insidiously returned in our treatment of the "Holy Bible." It is worth inquiring whether the very phrase "Holy Bible" does not create a wrong mental attitude — an attitude of bibliolatry — toward a book whose whole effort is to fix our reverence upon the only One who is holy.

By our theories we have sought to testify to the transcendent spiritual worth of the biblical record. We aim to say that it is rich in spiritual ideals; that, best of all books, it convinces us of the reality of divine revelation and the meaning of it; and that by means of the Bible we get our

best spiritual guidance. The supremacy of the Bible, among books, as practical means of exhibiting the divine purpose and of conducting us to the best moral and religious insight, is not questioned. But this high estimate of the practical revelation value of the Bible is not tantamount to affirming any of the theories of the Bible which set it over against all other books as "infallible" or "inerrant"; nor does it justify any language which provides an absolute distinction between the nature of the record and that of all other records. When we bring to bear upon this problem the general principles which we have been expounding, it releases us from all these false and harmful distinctions. The Bible becomes a collection of literature with human authors, and with a human history. It presents the limitations of all human authorship, and betrays the influences of history in its composition, in its assembling into a unity, its manuscripts, its translations, and not least in the method of its use in the church. It is a record of men controlled in a rare degree by religious reality. It includes our chief record of




Jesus Christ, the Person who was supremely controlled by the God-consciousness, who has supremely revealed God to men. These things are not in question. But all of this is not inconsistent with the conviction that the Bible is yet only a faithful, veracious, historical record of spiritual experience where the spiritual understanding of men of succeeding ages finds the authority of the truth; — except as we have superimposed an intellectual theory of the miraculous uniqueness of the record which warps and constrains our approach to its meanings!

All of the considerations of language, of thought-laws, of the psychological nature, which we have passed in review, impel us to think the Bible record and the Bible revelation in relative and not absolute terms. It must be studied with precisely the presuppositions which we bring to other records of life. This is true, however transcendent the spiritual insight expressed. We must know the atmosphere and conditions surrounding the making of the record; we must know as far as possible the men who produced it; we must bring

our canons of rational criticism and evaluation; and we must gain spiritual insight therefrom by bringing our own answering spiritual insight. Thus by the vital processes of personal contact, through meanings and experiences, and not by any guaranteed method, the revelation comes to the reader of the Bible. Thus God is "revealed"; thus a new experience is "created"; thus the sense of divine reality is awakened; thus the practical guidance that life needs is won.


Such a view does not challenge the facts touching the spiritual dynamics of the Bible. It simply recognizes that such mechanical language as "an infallible rule of faith and practice" does not fit the case, for the reason that our approach is personal and not mechanical. With the fluency and the freedom and the limitations of personal life we approach the Bible and find its meaning and its authority, — and thus its revelation. We are not coerced by any presupposition of the uniqueness of the Bible, but by the subtle and irresistible acknowledgment, which our spiritual natures make, of the truth set forth.



What is surplusage over this, seems to us clinging superstition, hurtful theories, offered, to be sure, with the most loyal intent to guard spiritual ends. This self-evidencing, revealing value of the Bible is not independent of the church, society, and all the truth that comes by history through other men. The Bible is not a record of a now discontinued revelation. The reaction of the Bible upon us is not a magical thing, but only expresses the faithful laws of the spiritual and the rational. Revelation is always socially and historically conditioned. Utter individualism in dealing with the Bible meanings must give way to a better social insight. The Bible must be viewed, not in a vacuum, but in the context of history. All traditions of infallibility which remove the Bible from the canons by which we always test life's meanings drop away as outworn, untrue, and therefore hurtful. Theories of "canons," "inspiration," and "revelation," once the inevitable presupposition of Bible study, lose most of their interest for modern students.


The quickening of the power of spiritual apprehension and expression that comes to

holy men who enter into living relations of prayer, can hardly be overstated. Inspiration is a real fact. It expresses this heightened sensitiveness to spiritual reality and truth, of which the law and condition is the uncompromising law of love and righteousness. Biblical literature is full of the best examples of men who spoke and wrote with the "open vision." The convincing power of their religious messages lies in the self-authenticating appeal of these messages to us. Such men speak with permanent authority to our spiritual natures. It is by no mere chance that the clearest generalization of this principle of revelation comes from the lips of the supreme Spiritual Seer of the ages: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The Bible is full of this God-consciousness and of the sure note of religious guidance. It is therefore the very bread of life to the spiritually hungry. It is our preëminent means of arousing, nourishing, and instructing the religious life. But we must impose no theory upon the Bible which separates the spiritual life of that time from our own; or which exempts us from the universal



conditions of prophetic insight and utterance.

Applying the principle of development and relativity to the biblical record does not affect the unique supremacy of the Bible in its practical ministry to the church. Its practical supremacy is universally conceded. It affects only our mental attitude toward the Book and its contents, as we interpret it. The traditional attitude regards the Bible as a safe and authoritative guide only as we recognize some safeguarding principle, some irreducible absolute that distinguishes the Bible as a book from other books. This attitude, however modified, always exhibits some vestige of external authority as a necessity of religious guidance. On the other hand, the modern attitude distrusts such a safeguarding principle as irrational and useless, and therefore hurtful. It feels that the only spiritual guidance that is adequate is the autonomous response of the soul to perceived meanings. This is an internal response and cannot be forced upon us. By fact of the kinship of the human mind with the divine, we carry the




power of response to the authority of the spiritual. Who speaks to our spiritual natures must speak with spiritual and not scribal authority.

The practical consequences for exegesis and theology of accepting the one conception of the Bible or the other, are very marked. The traditional method of exegesis assumes that the "truth" is somehow compassed within the Bible. The process of revelation is identical with our scriptural account; and the process is now discontinued. The mental attitude is not that of empirically searching to discover the truth of the record, or the meaning of a given part of it. Rather, it is controlled by the presupposition that the whole or sum of religious truth is somehow here, an absolute quantity, which exegetical work can ferret out, and which it is the task of dogmatics to articulate into a system. This exegetical method always works under the constraint of certain implicit or explicit presuppositions of the uniqueness of the record. The processes of revelation are regarded as so guaranteed even in its human instruments

that the result may be a "complete" or "perfect," that is, an absolute revelation. Even exegetes who profess to have abandoned this traditional theory of the biblical content are yet ruled to an amazing degree by this tacit attitude toward their task. "The Bible is the source of theology; it is the work of the exegete to find the truth; systematic theology can only formulate it," — this is the exact language of one learned exegete. "Our theology must be brought to the Bible to be proved" is the utterance of another scholar. It is evident that to such expounders the Bible is a "Supernatural Book."

The logical consequences of this mental attitude are well illustrated in history. It tacitly anticipates an orthodoxy, a standard of theological truth that shall be permanently valid. It assumes that the "absolute" contained in the Bible, perfectly understood, would yield a permanently authoritative theological system. In this view, orthodoxy is the goal of systematic theology, the sum of religious truth, a fixed point beyond which insight cannot go, and which reason cannot touch, since



it is the product of revelation and not of reason. In opposition to this "revealed" theology, "natural theology" has always been rated as inferior or inimical to religion. What fanaticism and dogmatism has not taken unassailable refuge in "The Word" thus absolutely regarded!

Modern exegetical method, on the other hand, looks for no ulterior canons of interpretation, save those enforced by the best scientific sense in its endeavour to gain the human intent of the record. For no presuppositions arbitrarily separating the Bible from other records of spiritual history are valid here. Nothing is further from the purpose of modern exegesis than mechanical programmes of revelation, charts of prophecy, schemes and keys and "golden threads" calculated to exhibit the Bible as a supernaturally guaranteed unity. The Bible is not regarded as a divinely-given text-book of religion, a supernaturally accredited Word of God, a court of last appeal in matters of spiritual controversy. It is not a handbook of dispensations and eschatologies. Neither is it necessary to affirm any unity in the Bible save that

of men controlled by a common spirit and purpose. The modern exegete is not searching for a final account of spiritual truth by which to standardize his own thinking. He is frankly seeking for the ideals and convictions and forms of experience which express the spiritual realities of the various religious writers and the races for which they spoke. He regards the writers, not as oracles, but as fellow-students of the mystery of godliness. He finds thus living truth and not infallible items of revealed information. The Bible is thus not so much an object of study, as a means of study. "Instead of being dictated by the Bible, a man's theology should be inspired within him by the Bible, or, more truly, inspired in him through the Bible by the spirit which inspired the Bible." And above all the student has no sense of seeking the finality of a now discontinued revelation.

The revelation-value of the biblical record is thus not attested by any a priori standard, nor has "revelation" any technical connotations. But revelation is simply defined as that which is actually

revealed of God in the spiritual history recorded, no matter how or where. And the "testing" or "proof" of the revelation is the verification which our experience yields when we in like manner, with the spiritual heroes of old, commit ourselves to righteousness and to holy ideals of character and service. "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." The Bible as a book has no lonely preëminence save its preëminent spiritual worth, its content of meaning. The modern exegete, discarding all arbitrary and artificial canons of revelation-method, believes that obedience to the moral law is the condition of every spiritual perception of the divine. Spiritual receptivity coupled with sympathy and intellectual clearness are the sole canons required for the understanding of the divine meaning in human life. To enforce other presuppositions of biblical study is to warp the vision of the divine reality in life, and to make the divine revelation a past fact rather than a present experience.

III. *The Consequences for our Conception of the Relationship of Christianity to Jesus Christ*

For one who avows the spiritual lordship of Jesus Christ, and who recognizes the supreme historical revelation of the divine in the person of Jesus Christ, there is likely to be a mood of disinclination for the task of dealing analytically with the Fact which somehow compels our highest reverence and obedience, and inspires in us, to the highest degree, the spirit of worship. It is a part of the empirical data which we must not neglect, that the immediate and instinctive effect of contact with Jesus Christ has been to awaken the profoundest religious response coupled with the desire to call others to a like contact and a like response. Not analysis, but evangelism, is the mood which expresses the reaction upon men of intimate contact with the Founder of Christianity.

On the other hand, the task of seeking the rationale of the supreme experience of the Christian life cannot be escaped. Witnesses to this are the ever multiplying

essays in the Christological problem. It is surely better to approach the task with some appreciation of its practical magnitude than to leave it in the hands of theorists for whom the problem has a false simplicity or merely an academic interest. Moreover, our tribute to the supremacy of Christ in history is not complete until the account of the intellect has come to its best. Not abjectness, but eager inquiry, seems to have been the attitude of mind most acceptable to Jesus Himself.

When we approach the actual problem of how we shall think the relationship of Jesus Christ to our ethical and religious guidance, we find it already entangled with many theories. Many of these are naïvely held or are determined by the instinctive reverence which ignores all rational canons. And it is significant that the most dogmatic and intolerant of all interpretations are offered by those who profess to have no theory, but only "Christ" or the "Simple Gospel." One learns to distrust this attitude of mind which indiscriminately confuses fact and interpretation, and tacitly denies to thoughtful Chris-

tianity the right to rest its reverence upon an intelligible basis. In most of the orthodox conceptions of Christ it has been felt that here at least a static interpretation can be carried through. It has been alleged that here in Christ the idea of an absolute measure of human life can be found. According to this type of interpretation, we have here a perennially valid standard that needs no revision, no interpretation. It is enough to "see Jesus only."

The merit of this insistent claim lies in its intention to exalt Jesus Christ rather than in any success in showing how Jesus' leadership is actually effected. When it comes to concrete guidance, we are agreed that in the realm of spiritual life and thought Jesus is the supreme leader and teacher. Spiritual authority for the race centres in this supreme spiritual Person. We bring conduct and theology alike to Jesus Christ for their testing. But how does He test them and offer spiritual guidance in concrete life? That is the problem.

In the first place, it is immensely significant that by common consent every type

of enlightened ethics and spiritual teaching tries to gain the authority of Jesus Christ. He is instinctively recognized as the spiritual colossus of our human world. As stellar systems obey their astronomical centre, so, independent of all theories, do ethical systems swing into the power of this supreme spiritual dynamic. The spiritual primacy of Jesus is never in question; but the way of conceiving Jesus and the manner of making His acknowledged primacy complete and effective is not clear. Can we by analysis show the real dimensions of experience in this matter of Christian leadership, indicating the limitations of typical theories and pointing to the true nature of the power which gives Jesus Christ His spiritual mastery and thus makes Him the spiritual centre of our human world? This will involve the rejection of all mechanical and magical accounts of Christ's place in human life, as well as all accounts which are but survivals of an age of myth and superstition. Christ's actual place of power in experience and history is the fact which we seek to expound. Our instrument in testing the dimensions and

significance of this unchallenged experience is the commonly accepted historical, psychological, and ethical insight that scientific study puts at our disposal. We can here only outline the nature of the inquiry and the conclusion.

1. We can rest in no mythological or supernaturalistic account of Jesus' relationship to life.

Perhaps nowhere is the confusion of religious fact with theological explanation more in evidence than in our Christological conceptions. Nowhere does the uncritical use of language more easily betray us into affirmations which, while satisfying our moral loyalty, yet violate our scientific consciousness. Thus the vivid experiences which express our personal and ethical reaction to Jesus' leadership are often accounted for in the most realistic fashion with little thought of their incongruity. It is partly this realism in psychology and partly our proneness to make metaphysics out of metaphorical language which has led to a mechanical account of Christ as somehow inhabiting our individual territory of experience, and influencing or

coercing us by sheer impact. The idea of "possession" was a common one among the ancients. An individual might be "possessed" either by a good or an evil "spirit." That is, the spirit was localized and conceived as actually residing within the individual. Both the materialistic and the mythological reference of such an explanation of psychological and ethical data forbid its employment to-day in a serious sense. Yet the vivid language of Scripture speaking of Christ "in us," or "indwelling," so graphically describes Christian realities that it is easy to be led astray by the language. A crude theory thus becomes identified with a blessed and undeniable fact. When this is done, there is always danger of the excesses of ignorant fanaticism, or a tendency to promote an unreal "experience" as the mark of true religion. Only a better understanding of the essential spiritual realities involved can save us from this folly. The reality testified to by the best religious consciousness is indeed that of personal "fellowship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The mode of conceiving such personal fellowship, and the mystery

of the consciousness of God, are matters for our thought, but not for dogmatism or undisciplined imagination. "Christ liveth in me" is the vivid language of religious experience, and must not be made to yield a metaphysics of psychology. Generally speaking, the mystery of the religious relationship is that of all personal relations. The religious fact is to be cherished. But crude mythological representations of personal relationships appeal to the imagination without satisfying the scientific consciousness.

The ethical quality of Christian experience conceived thus in terms of miracle or mythology, and not in terms of our normal moral realities, will always be under suspicion. Fanaticism always lurks where the vivid conception of a religious "experience" tends to supersede the ethical and spiritual conditions of experience. Our conception of Jesus Christ and of the religious experience mediated through Him, must be capable of assimilation to our best human realities and our highest convictions of religion.

Popular evangelism has often given cur-

rency to a form of Christolatry which results in a Jesus-cultus rather than in the establishing of the great fundamental verities of religion. Any interpretation of Jesus Christ which obscures His own supreme emphasis upon His Father God, fails to express the "mind of Christ." His passion to reveal His Heavenly Father to men condemns the methods of those who would make the historical Jesus the centre of our human worship. And the sentimental or emotional hymnology which expresses this crude Christolatry can but cheapen or obscure the great religious ideals that controlled Jesus Christ and the issues which He taught as fundamental for His followers. This superstitious regard for Jesus, in the name of holy reverence, can only receive correction by a more discriminating grasp of religious essentials, and a rational regard for the scientific factors which condition the problem. "Worship God" was Jesus' counsel to those whose worship was not directed to the Object of His own passionate devotion — the Heavenly Father!

2. Jesus as a perfect and universally

valid pattern for human conduct is not an adequate account of His spiritual primacy.

This type of explanation has always a distinctly ethical emphasis, and thus a wholesome moral ministry. It regards Jesus as the one Example in history of a universally valid pattern to be copied by every one who would live a perfect life. The function of every individual Christian, then, is faithful imitation.

It is first of all to be noted that this conception of Jesus' place in Christianity has as its corollary a method of Bible study controlled by the search for a detailed picture of Jesus' life and teaching. The tendency is to magnify every statement and word as a fragment of the Perfect Pattern compassed by the New Testament account. The effort is to "restore" the perfect picture that inheres in the Scriptures, and which the process of the centuries has marred. "Back to the Christ of the Gospels" has proved an inspiring shibboleth for Bible study. This has, however, often resulted in unrealities of exegesis and undue emphasis upon texts and passages. It is an ideal of Bible study which

easily falls prey to literalisms and other mechanical fallacies which obscure the large spiritual ideals.

This latter fact itself is a serious arraignment of the imitation method of regarding Jesus' leadership. But the real condemnation of the "Perfect Standard" method of regarding Jesus' relationship to Christian life and conduct lies in the fact that such a method, unqualifiedly adopted, is not capable of furnishing the leadership that personal life requires, and does not express the true moral fact.

In the matter of conduct, the abstract notion of a Perfect Man has haunted our search for a universally valid example in Christ. A better knowledge of personality makes it perfectly apparent that the search for uniformity is impracticable. In the first place it violates the law of individuality with its endlessly varied ways of expressing in conduct the ideals of personality. To impress a given type or pattern upon human conduct would be to stifle the spirit of free self-expression which lies at the bottom of all moral character. All great personalities help and teach their fellows, but the stimu-

lus that awakens original response is a higher form of guidance than the imitation of any example. In the case of Jesus' leadership preëminently, the power of His transcendent personality stirs the deepest currents of personal power in us and awakens the spirit of personal response. The value of this regenerative experience of the church in its relation to Jesus Christ is largely in the spirit and ideals which such a Jesus-centred ethics arouses in us. The follower of Jesus is "born from above," and becomes a "new creature" in Jesus Christ. The inward spirit communicated is something incommensurable with even a perfect outward imitation. It is creative rather than imitative.

In truth, the matter of religious guidance does not call for patterns or for rules, but for something very much higher. To say "Do as Jesus would do in your place" is not as concrete a principle as it seems, for the very problem of what Jesus would do under given circumstances is a problem which we cannot come to agreement upon, since there is so much in life that is relative and changing. Precisely what would Jesus

do if he were a lawyer, or doctor, or merchant, or teacher, or working-man, or city mayor, with a setting in our modern life? Precisely what course would He pursue in dealing with our characteristic social and economic problems? The question cannot be directly and definitely settled to our uniform satisfaction. The attempt to quote Scripture as furnishing an infallible pattern of conduct soon proves futile. Moreover, for the thoughtful man or woman the question is not, after all, "What would Jesus do in my place?" Rather it is the problem, *What ought I to do under given definite circumstances?* It is a problem that cannot be finally and infallibly settled by quoting texts and precedents, even when they deal with Jesus' words and example. For principles and insights and ideals — *a right spirit* — are the deepest conditions of personal guidance. The value of the concrete Example of Jesus in the Gospels is inestimable; but until we lay hold of the very Spirit and Power — the inner life — that *produced* the Example, we cannot determine the contemporary form of Christianity, dealing with our characteristic

problems and our characteristic social developments.

This pattern type of ethics, dealing with Jesus, proves inadequate at three points: 1. It fails to reckon with the fact that no complete account of Jesus' conduct can be had, and consequently no "perfect picture" of human life. 2. It fails to see that such an example could not in any case be transferable as completely normative for living situations. 3. In short, it fails to supply the creative spiritual insight and dynamic that personal life needs for ethical mastery and achievement. It does not fathom the complexity of the human need.

We are thus driven to a deeper account of the function of Jesus Christ in His relationship to the church. His deepest ministry is to the inner life, in awakening the spirit and creating a new spiritual attitude toward life, — an attitude which shall rest upon the same secure and confident basis as His own unhindered realization of the spiritual world. In short, Jesus' supreme function in His relationship to His disciples is not that of a Mediator who always stands between us and the

Source of spiritual life, but rather a Mediator who leads us to the very Source itself. Christian living is not second-hand, but first-hand contact with the Living Father of Life. To "follow Jesus" in this sense is not mere imitation — "walking in His steps." Jesus' meaning is rather "Follow Me into this deep experience of spirituality, of contact with the Source of Life which shall be as a Spring of water *within you*, springing up into everlasting life." This describes the fundamental reality of spiritual experience where personality exercises highest authority over personality. Jesus Christ becomes the supreme Saviour of men in thus opening the very springs of spiritual life. Christ is Spirit, and not pattern. Imitative Christianity fails; creative Christianity conquers.

A student of the Bible controlled by this large insight into Jesus' significance for human conduct will search the Scriptures which testify of Jesus with a somewhat different spirit and method from the one controlled by the tacit assumption of a perfect model or precedent for every conceivable duty or situation. One is

seeking a spirit, the other a standard. The static account of Jesus must give place to the realities of spiritual and ethical experience, eagerly appropriating from Jesus the very spirit and insight which were the source of His supreme mastery over life. The quest for Christian uniformity gives place to the quest for true Christian unity, in which loyalty to the spirit of Jesus Christ shall be the significant concern.


The Christian ideal of the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ as elastic and progressive, finds insistent emphasis in our age at two important points in the work of the church. First, in dealing with the characteristic social and industrial problems that loom so large in our day, this conception of Christ's leadership alone can save society for the church. Any stereotyped Christian standard fails. The relativities of speech and thought and life must be given recognition in the form of Christianity which is to conquer the modern world and the world of the future. We pointed out in the preceding chapter that moral realities grow out of given living situations, and do not exist in the form of absolute standards to

be endlessly repeated. A guaranteed rule of action contradicts life's freedom. A rigid programme means the defeat of the church. But a confident conception of Christ's spirit freely guiding the reconstructing and regenerating forces of the social organism is the earnest of the ultimate salvation of society. The life of our generation and of every other has certain original developments, and the Christianity that is to understand and save this life must be capable of infinite adaptation. Christ can be preached as the salvation of society to-day only as we can make His spirit live in the concrete forms of to-day's life, and only as we can reveal that spirit as the regenerating power that will solve the crying needs of life. The profound social currents of to-day will not heed Christ, nor "see" Him, until He is revealed as the personal Spirit who understands these social currents and who has the healing remedy. Our characteristic social problems must be seen "in Christ" just as convincingly as the men of His own day saw their moral and spiritual problems through His eyes. In the changed con-

ditions and ideals of life we must preach the Christ who as sympathetically and authoritatively fathoms our life as the Jesus of Galilee fathomed the life of His day. The "larger Christ" — the Living Christ — will rebuke and teach and save the complex life of our generation and of every other. Jesus is Spirit — the supreme Spirit in history. He is capable of reincarnation in every legitimate type of human development.

The other point of critical need of reinterpreting the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ is in dealing with urgent world-problems that press for solution. Races of men, civilizations, world-movements, are conditioning the religious problem as never before, and call for statesmanlike solution. No stereotyped conception of religion can provide for the potencies of this developing life. No missionary programme, not dominated by breadth of vision, can commend Christ convincingly to awakening civilizations. No Occidental Christ can save an Oriental race. The spirit of the Christ must be perceived through the temperaments and types of races to be evangelized. "What is Christianity" is a question to be

asked with renewed earnestness by consecrated Christian leaders. And the answer will be found only as the marvellous magnitude and versatility of the Spirit of Jesus Christ so fills us that we shall lay aside the limitations with which a loving tradition has clothed Him, and see Him through the eyes of "alien" races. We too often forget that the Christ of our Western Christianity is the Christ whose Spirit was incarnated in the form of a Syrian civilization, but whose Spirit we have won and reincarnated in terms of the Occident. We must grant to every race this privilege of finding the universal Christ and of expressing His spirit and interpreting it in forms of life which may not indeed assimilate to our racial type. Every nation and tongue and type must learn to know Him by gaining His outlook upon life and His very spirit. He must be "crowned with many crowns," — this spiritual Master of Life. We shall eventually witness the Spirit of Christ equally at home in the speech, and dress, and habits of thought and life of all nations. Our Gospel will come back to us enriched with new mean-



ings which our limited vision never perceived.

3. The relationship of Christian thought to Jesus Christ.

The preceding discussion of Christ's relationship to Christianity has dealt chiefly with matters of conduct and life. The static method of relating Christ to life fails here. And it is not otherwise in the realm of faith and belief. We cannot bring our doctrines to Christ as the absolute oracle in the world of spiritual truth. In short, Christian theology is not capable of "proof" by the utterances of Jesus Christ, though it is to be tested by His spirit.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that the same considerations which outline Jesus' authority for conduct, show the spiritual nature of His relationship to our thinking. He is not an oracular revealer of spiritual truths, but He is Himself the Spirit of truth, — moral personality at its best, gaining and communicating spiritual knowledge in ways commensurate with our own spiritual experience. Therefore Christian theology is not constructed out of supernaturally re-

vealed items of truth, nor built upon ex-cathedra utterances of Jesus as divine Son of God. But a Christian doctrine is that form of belief produced in a given civilization by the spirit of Jesus Christ incarnated in terms of the rational and spiritual development of that people. The best Christian form of faith is that which is produced by the spirit of Christ working in men conditioned by the rational and spiritual atmosphere of their times. Jesus himself regarded His teaching and spirit as "seed" to bring forth fruit. Our best Christian doctrines must be those forms of belief which that seed has produced in His faithful followers. For Christian doctrines, thus conceived, there can be no mechanical "proof" or absolutely guaranteed authority; but the verification of Christian doctrine must be sought in the best Christian consciousness, faithfully employing those tests of truth which express the ethical and rational standards of the race and times.

With this conception of the elastic nature of spiritual truth it is evident that the older method of imposing ready-made or-

thodoxies upon civilizations to be evangelized must be modified. The missionary preaches Jesus Christ — His spirit and character in terms of His life and teaching — and the religious interpretation of life and the world thus awakened in India and China and Japan will be as truly Christian as that which has grown up in the church of the Western world. But it will exhibit certain fundamental contrasts to our Occidental interpretations. The spiritual and rational and temperamental outlook of the races will all demand expression in the religious interpretation which vitally expresses their religious need and ministry. That Jesus Christ, preached as ethical spirit, moral personality, has universal and inexhaustible power to evoke the same spirit of love and faith which dwelt in Him, is our conviction. That He will thus reveal the deepest truths about God is equally certain. But in thus becoming the world's spiritual Master and Saviour, He is not a superhuman oracle of truth, but an Inspirer of divine truth. Inspiration and not dictation is the ideal of all high spiritual revelation.

Thus the standardizing of theology becomes an impossible ideal. But confident belief about spiritual reality springs into life everywhere that the spirit of Christ finds free expression. *Contact with spiritual reality is the ground of our conviction and assurance.* The life produced in us is the justification of our belief. The spiritual experience of fellowship with Jesus Christ is the ultimate condition of Christian certainty. This inner moral experience yields a fearless attitude toward life which trusts the forms of life's ideals to construe for the understanding the nature of spiritual truth. The goal of Christian thinking thus conceived is not dogmatics, but the complete spiritual authority of Jesus Christ. We evoke His authority not to justify our *form* of faith, but rather *to justify the faith itself* which insistently clamours for reasonable expression. It must be left to the scientific and philosophic consciousness to shape the persuasive contemporary form of Christian faith.


CHAPTER V

THE PERIL OF A SAFE THEOLOGY

THE multiplication of safety appliances for the protection of human life is a marked characteristic of our age. No humane ministry to society is more consistently and forcefully urged than the providing of automatic safety devices to supplant the older method of reliance upon personal attention and intelligence. "Such accidents will happen until we eliminate the whole human element by means of automatic provisions," observed a railroad operator after a recent disaster. He followed the statement with an informing discussion concerning the installing of safety appliances on his own line of road, in response to the demands of the public conscience. There is always a position and a premium for the inventive genius who can substitute for fallible human attention an automatic response that works infallibly. The disabled switchman, the drunken watchman, the recreant employee, can be

more and more dispensed with as his services are supplied by the mechanical device which never sleeps nor drinks whiskey, and whose integrity does not call for any subjective processes. Lives of employees and of patrons by the thousands are thus guarded and saved every year. And the principle is so humane and sound that we do not propose to halt while inventive skill is unexhausted or the reluctant employer remains unpunished.

Our object here is not to question the beneficence of these things; we are concerned rather with a by-product. What are the moral consequences of safety devices — their effect upon character? and what are the limitations of mechanical safety in the complex and responsible activities of human achievement? Does the elevator man become a more or a less responsible person when he feels that not his own skill and attention, but an automatic device, stands between his passengers and disaster? Do railway employees, when relieved of personal responsibility, develop the types of character that under the old system fitted them to advance as con-



ductors, engineers, and managing officers? What is the effect upon a board of directors of knowing that they have provided "every device for the safety and comfort of their patrons"? In short, does the movement contribute to responsible character, or does it not?

These questions are not asked from a wholly academic point of view. I would not curtail practical efforts to reduce risks by safety appliances, but I am apprehensive of the results of safety produced at the cost of all human sentiment, and I raise the question whether in the long run it is not possible for the impersonal and the practical to defeat its own ends and suffer a practical revenge. For in the end the control of automatism is in the hands of personality, and real safety is secured for us only through the sentiment which is developed in the life of the men who own and control automatic devices.


The question is of course only a special aspect of the problem which the ideals of mechanism always create when they invade the realm of the personal. Wherever automatism carries its ideals too far, something

very precious and fundamental in human life is threatened. In the boy set to watch the primitive steam-engine, who discovered that he could so attach the levers that they would operate the steam-valves mechanically and thus dispense with his attention to them, we have the symbol of a racial experience quite as fateful in its potential influence upon human kind as the experience symbolized by the venerable tradition of the forbidden fruit and its resultant catastrophe.

As the aim of this discussion is to investigate and not to dogmatize, we shall content ourselves with indicating certain points where the demand for automatic safety threatens to obscure or defeat some of the finer issues of life.

In a thoughtful piece of literature, "The Preliminaries," contributed by Miss Comer to the *Atlantic Monthly* for October, 1910, we have a convincing illustration, in terms of life, of the universal demand for automatic safety, and its intrinsic weakness. The story deals with the fortunes of two lovers who are held back from the consummation of their hearts' desire by prudential

considerations urged on both sides. Fond parents, admitting the obvious fitness of the marriage, at the same time poison the atmosphere of the romance as well as destroy the peace of their own lives by dread apprehensions of possible miscarriage of plans or fatal taint or weakness of character. The objections raised are not definite and positive, but are only formulations of the general lack of certainty involved in all dealing with the future. They tacitly demand guaranteed insurance against all possible evil before life can be sanctioned and accepted as blessed. The apprehensions are aggravated by a grim tragedy of justice that has overtaken the head of one family and embittered life. The natural consequence is that all concerned are living on the verge of nervous prostration. All see life's problems through morbid eyes and with fretful spirits. All save one. The father of the woman, a convict behind prison walls, has learned in suffering and meditation the true philosophy of life — the philosophy of life's inevitable risks. He reverses the nervous prudential counsel of the others, with their nameless fear for the



future. The highest point of the dramatic movement of the story is his counsel addressed to the youth, who visits him in prison on the delicate mission of asking for the hand of his daughter :

"They haven't the point of view.' It is life that is the great adventure. Not love, not marriage, not business. They are just chapters in the book. The main thing is to take the road fearlessly, — to have courage to live one's life. . . . That is the great word. Don't you see what ails your father's point of view, and my wife's? One wants absolute security in one way for Ruth; the other wants absolute security in another way for you. And security — why it's just the one thing a human being cannot have, the thing that's the damnation of him if he gets it! The reason it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is that he has that false sense of security. To demand it just disintegrates a man. I don't know why, — it does. . . . The mastery of life comes with the knowledge of our power to endure. That's it. You are safe only when you can stand everything that can happen to you. Thus and thus only! Endurance is the measure of the man. . . . Courage is security. There is no other kind."

Very like in kind is the philosophy uttered in a "Sketch of Life on the Road" by a wandering philosopher :

"How can any man look for true adventure in life if he always knows to a certainty where his next meal is coming from? In a world so completely dominated by goods, by things, by possessions, and smothered by security, what fine adventure is left to a man of spirit save the adventure of poverty?"

Now I am not an apologist for the convict, nor for the picturesque, ecclesiastical, mendicant saint; nor yet for the less picturesque and unecclesiastical mendicant sinner. But the point of view which regards life as an adventure, emphasizes a principle of faith—faith and strength and insight born of the needs of the moment—which seems to me a neglected factor in many of our closed and rigid systems of interpretation of life. For every specific spiritual situation as it arises there is a new insight born of the new experience. No standardized interpretation expresses the whole truth of such an hour. Like the manna of the wilderness, if we try to preserve our spiritual truth for days ahead, it spoils on our hands. Faith is the only mental attitude that overcomes the world—not security! The voluntary acceptance of life seems somehow to precede and condition our proofs and cer-

tainties. We have in the citations given, if I mistake not, recognition of the subtle evil involved in an excessive demand to surround life with safety devices. Security, whether purchased by riches or rank or rationalism or other automatic means of safety, tends to create a sense of ease which is the menace of the soul. We must work out our salvation in any realm, if we want the distinctive reward of that realm. Certain personal capacities and creative moral insights and sympathies shrink and shrivel when they are oversubsidized by external securities.


One effect of the demand for automatic safety is seen in the history of the mightiest and most precious impulse of life, the religious nature. The larger half of Christendom is organized on the principle that we need an infallible guidance for life; that religion, with its issues of eternal life and death, is too fateful a matter to be trusted to the limitations of our hard-won wisdom; that here at least we must know before we act. We are all familiar with the mechanical logic by which J. H. Newman satisfied his soul that there must be somewhere an

automatic safety device for religious hearts longing for certainty. That logic led Newman into the only ecclesiastical fellowship which guaranteed infallible guidance. The guarantee of safety first, life and trust afterward, — millions of people nominally allege this principle as fundamental and inevitable in life's deepest concerns. Of course, history alone can vindicate or disprove its merits, and the history is open to us all.

On the other hand, the Protestant wing of Christendom is in nominal revolt against external religious guarantees, and avows its purpose to rest life upon faith, which shall win its own certainties. But alas for the logic of Protestantism, there is an unformulated dialectic in human nature which leads straight back to the safety device. A hundred years or so after the Protestant movement had challenged the automatic safety of the Catholic church in the name of "salvation by faith," the Bible appeared in the light of "an infallible rule of faith and practice"; and either avowedly or nominally that is the rôle which the Christian Scriptures play in the religious life of

the multitude to-day. We will have a safety contrivance to guard personal life in its deepest issues. We will have Authority as the highest court of appeal. Either Holy Church or Holy Bible must furnish a principle of infallible security. The consequences for Protestant theology of thus dealing with the Bible as a "supernatural revelation" — an authoritative text-book — and not as a transcript of the realities of human experience in its religious development, have been immense. Surely the theologies of the future will trust the revelations of God that came to the moral heroes of old, even though we test their knowledge of spiritual things by the same psychological and epistemological canons that we bring to our own religious experiences.

We have protested against the flaunting of guaranteed salvation announced over church doors: "*Plena indulgentia quotidie.*" That smacks of commercialism and legalism. But many who shudder at the principle thus brazenly published, offer to furnish the same brand of safety in subscriptions to various orthodoxies, and thus to bring into life a sense of peace and security.



For our constituency demand both security and large returns before they will invest. This is the underlying philosophy of every "safe" orthodoxy.

Again, in the very citadel of faith, where religion professes to achieve the personal assurance of unseen realities, this demand for independent, safeguarding principles haunts us. With curious infidelity to the personal confidence in a supreme living Spirit, which is the essence of the best religion, the church has yet cherished the intellectual "proof" of God as a buttress and bulwark of her faith, and we have felt secure only when the burden of our certainty was seen to rest, not upon faith, but upon an independent and universal basis. The "direct and fundamental proofs" have thus tended to supplant the faith upon which we once felt that true religion should rest. The moral consequences of theistic proofs have not been more salutary than those of the safety of infallible guidance, whether supplied by a church or a book. Thus one keen critic says :

"It has grown clear to all thinkers, first, that the God and soul of religion cannot be proved with

proofs that compel the assent of the intellect; and, secondly, that by such proofs there is, in a serious degree, the destruction of the values which are sought to be demonstrated."


Now faith does not come at the suggestion of distrust, but of trust. A safety device here seems an affront both to reason and to faith. The intellect must indeed offer its fortifying reasons, but the prior and deeper reason of faith takes precedence of all specific reasons. In living contact with spiritual reality the soul finds the irrefutable argument for God, and any proof which absolves the soul from this original vision of God weakens the case which it seeks to establish. No rationalism can take the place of the Moral Venture.

This study of the consequences of a principle might be carried into nearly every department of life, for religion is not alone in this error. The field of education is likewise infested with the fallacy of orthodox methods, mechanical devices to guarantee that every child shall be pedagogically "saved." The "system" sometimes stimulates and sometimes paralyzes the individual response of the "Child." In the field of law,

too, justice is often defeated rather than established by professional orthodoxies ; while in politics, machine methods are widely employed to relieve the individual of personal attention and responsibility, — to the demoralization of the citizen. These all illustrate the tendency to apply mechanical standards to life, to secure automatic safety, and to this extent to imperil and defeat the higher spiritual achievements of the race. The best condition of such achievement is the absence of these very safeguards and certainties, which are in no way wrung out of the deep experiences of life ; for the law of the spiritual is faith. No absolutions or indulgences are known to the moral law. The paradoxical truth is that every man must bear his own burden, even though he must also bear the burdens of others. The certainties of spiritual reality do not rest upon independent ground, but are conditioned by our own moral response to life ; and the highest spiritual discernment is not merely imitative, it is creative. The interpreter of religion, of law, or of pedagogy must be something more than a copyist. Even a lawyer ought

to be a prophet; but a theologian or a teacher must be one.

Now when in our preaching and teaching we so far disregard this principle of faith and freedom that we tacitly standardize our theology, we do so in response to the demand for an automatic safety device. This substitution of a mechanical theology for a spiritual is based upon a fallacious theory of knowledge, and it works harm. It is founded upon a bad philosophy and a shallow analysis of the whole problem of knowledge. For when our interpretation of spiritual truth is conditioned upon all sides by theories of sacred history, inspiration, infallible sources, divine tokens, revealed truth, and safe standards of doctrine, we virtually so subsidize our thinking about spiritual reality that a healthy spirituality and a stalwart theology are hardly possible. A really safe theology, like a safe chemistry, is one which faces the facts of life and their laws, and gives the profoundest account of them of which the mind is capable. It recognizes that the law of life is growth, and asks no other guarantee than that of faithful living and faithful thinking.



We have thus far dealt chiefly with the intrinsic fallacy of the safety method in religious interpretation. But it would not be hard to show, on the practical side, that a mechanical ideal in place of a spiritual ideal of religious interpretation is a menace to religious effectiveness. We may here simply enumerate two or three points at which a "safe theology" imperils the interests of "the Gospel which is committed to our trust."

The Christianizing of the Orient in this missionary age requires a recognition of types of mind and types of meaning which a rigid theological method does not recognize. If Jesus Christ and His message of God's love is to dominate and save Eastern civilizations with their millions of needy people, these peoples must be allowed to reinterpret our blessed gospel in forms of life and thought which our orthodoxies do not know. We must recognize the heterodox ways in which God is already manifesting Himself in the hearts of these people. We imperil a world message by provincial thinking. "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in

all." Does this not mean that the God who works in Islam and in Buddhism is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? It may well be that the truth of God and His Son will come back to us from the East with new depths of insight which our formulations never perceived. No rigid orthodoxy can deal sympathetically with this racial problem.


Again, a formal and safe theology is ineffective in dealing with the marvellous developments of ethical, social, economic, and industrial life about us. Christianity and the church are, measurably at least, losing the most splendid opportunity that history has offered to spiritualize life and bring to it the vision and the power of God in Christ, because we insist that the profound modern movements must conform to our orthodox interpretation of Christianity formulated under the influence of other social ideals. Thank God for prophetic men in the ministry who get their vision of God and the spiritual meaning of Christ in the life of to-day; whose measure of the divine revelation and redemption is not a safe orthodoxy, but the

whole range of human need, the whole development of human life. Thank God for ministers of Christ who see that the social life of to-day is as much God's as the social life of the past; who believe that God speaks to us and leads us as directly and authoritatively in our thought and life as He has spoken in the thought which we have inherited from the past, so inspiringly set forth in our Bibles. When we face this truth squarely, we shall no longer raise such issues as "Christianity or socialism," and "Christianity or economic reform," but our Christianity will be seen to include all these problems and the principles for their solution as well. Christ will still be seen as our spiritual Leader and Inspirer and Redeemer.

There is also a peril to the highest life of the church in measuring its spiritual possibilities in terms of an orthodox theology. I will not speak of the formalism which so easily besets ecclesiastical organizations, but rather of the danger to creative spiritual leadership. In a conception of spiritual truth and of theology which absolves the minister from profound


religious thinking upon the deepest concerns of life, there is an intellectual menace which must affect also the preacher's spiritual vision and the character of his message. One cannot enter the deep original vision of the meaning of spiritual things without first thinking things through in terms of fundamental principles. We do not require mere dispensers of second-hand visions. We do not need preachers who can demonstrate that God was in the thought and life of the past so much as we need those who can reveal a living God in the thought and life of to-day. These fundamental things are matters of present insight, personally achieved. Theology needs to be moralized along the whole line of her doctrines, but at no point is the need so critical as in this matter of her angle of approach — the intellectual method — which shall control the religious interpreter.

There is a mysterious but very precious doctrine of our Christian faith which sets forth in a positive way the very truth of which we have been speaking; that is, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. "He will guide you into all truth." Theology must



rely upon personal guidance, not mechanical control. Living guidance for living men, by the Spirit of the living God ! The sin against the Holy Ghost is the great sin in the Christian list. *It is the distrust of present guidance that throws a man back upon theological safety devices.* Real security in spiritual interpretation comes only from the present, free operation of the Spirit of Truth. Living guidance for thought and life can never harden into a code or orthodoxy. The only orthodoxy that is safe is this same Holy Spirit, eternally at work in the interpretations of men, eternally deepening our vision of God and the meaning of life. The truth of the Holy Spirit, effectually studied and practised, would render unnecessary this earnest protest against a safe theology. But, alas, the tendency has been to measure and standardize the very doctrine itself, in forgetfulness of the truth that God "giveth not the Spirit by measure."

In conclusion, if there is a peril in a safe theology, what is the theological method which will best serve the church and its Lord ? It is the method which speaks out



of a rich and profound spiritual experience, which has a sympathetic and intelligent understanding of the spiritual history of the past and of the spiritual life of to-day, and which trusts the accepted methods of sound thinking to guide its rational interpretations of spiritual reality. It is the method which discerns in the ethical and social forces of to-day the outworking purposes of a Living God, and stamps them with religious meaning. Christian theology is the type of theology which makes Christ's spirit the supreme test and dominating principle in setting a value on the facts of history and of life, as well as in interpreting their spiritual significance. In the frank employment of this method, the standardizing method of a "safe theology" would have no place; and without the method of rational and spiritual freedom, no orthodoxy is safe.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD; THE MAN CHRIST JESUS¹

"For there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus."
— 1 Timothy, ii. 5.

THE supreme concern of all religion is the problem of the place and manner of the meeting of the human and the divine. The conception of a Mediator is a common one and takes many forms. History records some very crude conceptions of the relation between God and men, in pagan religions and savage races. It is awe-inspiring to reflect that the whole human race is engaged on the one problem, united in this one quest. We are all engaged on the riddle of the universe: How shall we gain right conceptions of God and establish right relations with the deity?

In our Christian religion we bring all of our crowns to Jesus Christ, not simply

¹ Prepared and preached as a sermon to students.

because He is the Founder of the Church ; but because by common consent we feel that the religious problem permanently centres in Him. He is our mediator between God and men. The doctrine of the incarnation is a precious asset of the Christian faith to be cherished for its ministry to human life. Incarnation is a foundation-stone of the Church.

And so the Christological problem is always a primary problem of Christian thought. Church history witnesses on every hand to the recognition of this primacy. Our Christologies are historic attempts to answer the age-old question, "How does God come into our human life for the blessing of mankind?" The history of Christian doctrine is characterized by a great variety of answers, some of them quite as grotesque and crude as the pagan attempts. We have literalisms and superstitions and mechanical explanations of the meaning of Christ which repel us by their unspirituality ; and we have likewise many conceptions full of spiritual insight. Both friend and foe have done something to distort the picture of Christ ; for motives

of unwise loyalty as well as motives of disloyalty have sometimes veiled His face.

I know it is the fashion with a certain type of unthinking religious people to say : " We preach the Simple Gospel," or " We preach just Jesus Christ," " We need no conception of how God and man meet in Him." Or, perhaps, we quote the loyal words of Richard Watson Gilder's "Song of a Heathen" :

"If Jesus Christ is a man, —
And only a man, — I say
That of all mankind I cleave to Him,
And to Him will I cleave away.

"If Jesus Christ is a God, —
And the only God, — I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air !"

Now loyalty and poetry are to be cultivated in our approach to this mightiest Figure of history ; but He is the Lord of our thought, too, and neither loyalty nor poetry will suffer from trying to clarify our conception of Him, as we draw near with our spiritual and rational eyes wide open. Not fanatical service, but reason-

able service, is the highest ideal of religious obligation.

We may take as our threefold outline Jesus' words, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

I. Jesus is the "Way" for our human understanding only as we frankly and sympathetically know Him in terms of His human nature. All of our great historic creeds have testified to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, affirming that we find Him to be "very God and very man." But His humanity has never been cancelled by His divinity. He was human. He was a man, sharing the experiences and the laws of life which condition us. In our eagerness to get what we call "the revelation value" of Jesus, we sometimes discount this capital fact which is the condition and starting-point of all our interpretations of Him. In our loyalty and love we are prone to exalt Him by classifying Him as a prodigy introduced into a human race. But Jesus was a man tempted in all points like as we are, called to make choices and decisions, and to walk in the path of moral fidelity, as all good men must. He

was not like some prince from a royal household sent to an outlying province or a foreign country with a tacit understanding that the laws were to be suspended for His royalty and that deference must be shown Him. He was not a crown prince sent to a school with a tacit understanding that no one must excel His highness in intellectual standing or athletic prowess. He was first and simply a manly man, taking His place among men in a human world. He was first among many brethren — not an accredited son of a royal house among us on a diplomatic mission. If this subtle assumption of a royal son visiting our earth under special auspices creeps into our thought of the man Christ Jesus, we have no longer to do with a human magnitude, with a human reality.

Jesus was first of all a man. He met all the normal experiences of life as a man, with such conditions and helps as other men have — no other! He met discouragements, rebuffs, indignities, and failures as a man. His achievements were won as a man. As a man He had no mysterious stock of grace to draw on in emergencies

to sustain Him above common men. That mysterious "meat" that He had to eat, unshared by His disciples, was the meat that lonely men must find if they will live on spiritual heights. His disciples did not know of it because they were not sustaining a spiritual existence that could be nourished by such spiritual food. I thank God because I can believe that as a man He found spiritual food to enable Him to live above sin.

If I could climb to such spiritual heights as a man, I am confident that my Father and His would have appropriate spiritual food to sustain me. And the forces at His command, — the "legions of angels" — I do not know what it means; but I believe that the same cosmic forces are at my disposal when I require them. I believe that Gospel picture tries to make us see Him as "very man," in terms of human realities. I believe that we wrong Christ and dwarf His spiritual stature by our petty buttressing of His life with "divinity," which surely cuts the thread of moral reality, and thus insulates Him from us, when our salvation depends upon His being one of us.

. It is easy to see the motive which in the Gospel times and in later times has tried to account for the sublimity of His life and character. Our natural scepticism says that such a life or such a deed is not human. Awed by the spiritual magnitudes with which we are dealing, we call in conceptions of unhuman "divine" aids, and unhuman "divine" relations, in order to justify the fact of Jesus. When you stand before such a marvellous person as Jesus, there are just two ways of offering satisfactory explanation to your own understanding. One is to draw limits to human nature, and say that all of the astonishing surplusage that Jesus shows beyond this limit is the mysterious divine. Jesus is half man and half God !

The other is to admit that Jesus was "very man," but that he plumbed unfathomed depths of our human nature, and in these depths enacted that union with God which enables us to read the revelation in His face. We reverence this man who as a man passed every man in spiritual achievement and stands at the head of all the sons of God. Shamed and rebuked

and mastered, we look into the eyes of a Man, and not some prodigy.

In this view Jesus was very man in order that the very Living God might have a perfect form for revealing Himself. Thus the divine was incarnated — the supernatural was manifested in the natural — and not revealed as some surplusage added on to humanity.

I think we all have felt the unreality of an analysis of Jesus' consciousness which makes a line of cleavage between those things said and done as a man and those things said and done as God. Some of us have rebelled against the search for ex-cathedra utterances and those spoken in His private capacity. Surely the solution of the problem is to reverence the potential human powers and capacities which Jesus alone fulfilled and realized. The way to understand Jesus is to look into His face with the humility of men who have been content with small and dwarfed lives, and with the pride of men who belong to a common race with this Holy One who has forever mastered life and death. With the same tools with which we listlessly carve

our human destiny, He wrought out a majestic character which in every lineament and posture and act compels us to confess that in His Presence is the high place of human worship—that the Living God speaks to our race through Him. This man, Christ Jesus, is the One Mediator between God and men.

I urge a second point in advancing our thought of this matter :

II. Jesus is the “Truth” about God only as we sympathetically fathom His human nature.

The facts involved in our great human creed about Jesus Christ do not change, however we treat the matter of His human reality. He is “very God,” says the ancient creed. And the heart of the church to-day echoes faithfully the same meaning, “He is very God.” The fundamental problem of religion is indeed solved for the Christian in Jesus Christ. The meeting-place in history of the divine and the human is in that historic person, Jesus. Therefore we come to Him to gain our truest conceptions of God. We who have seen Him have seen the Father.

But even in this confession of the union of God with the Man Christ Jesus, we are often confused in the interpretation of the fact. "In looking at Jesus we see God," is the general intent of our Creed. But just what specific things in this man constitute the revelation of the divine Father? Shall we peer among his human qualities and discover unhuman or superhuman qualities and powers, and isolate these from the human and call these the revelation of Christ's deity? Or shall we faithfully follow the truly human nature until the magnitude of the spirit that is revealed in the human makes us aware that we are face to face with God?

When we face the problem squarely and try to give shape and form to our thought of the divine, we must face one of two alternatives. We must either employ our own highest human categories with the coefficient of infinity, or else we must invent new categories of thought. This is true, even when we see God in the face of Jesus Christ. For when we affirm that God is a Christlike God, that previous question comes up insistently, "Do we mean that

very human Christ, or do we mean some surplusage over the human that Jesus manifested? Is there a line of cleavage between his two natures, a double consciousness; or do we speak unreservedly of this glorious, complete Person, Jesus, who shares all our human realities?" God revealed in Jesus Christ is our primal religious fact; how shall we best approach and grasp such a spiritual magnitude?


I only want to urge that for the religious Gospel which we preach, the religious doctrines which we teach, the path to reality and truth and power and authority over men, is by way of Jesus' human reality. Whatever heights of spiritual vision we may attain, I believe that those heights will be attained by making fair and earnest with this man who has such power to win the world when the world sympathetically knows Him as a man. On the other hand, much of the unreality of religious teaching is found in the fact that it does not grip the really human because it is not read in the face of the human Jesus. "The glorious gospel of the blessed God which is committed to our trust" is a Gospel of God manifested in

human life. Jesus is not a God-Man, with the terms joined by a hyphen; He is very man with the very God dwelling in Him and speaking authoritatively through Him.

Somewhere in his sermons, that prince of preachers, Phillips Brooks, uses a figure of speech which illustrates our habit of thought in dealing with Jesus Christ. He says we gather up all the splendid and glorious things about Christ that give Him distinction and glory among men, and fasten them on to Jesus as men might tie flowers on to a post, — for we do not see that all this spiritual blossoming and fruitage roots in and grows out of the life that throbs in this Man, Christ Jesus. I think our loyal eagerness to exalt Jesus sometimes sees the spiritual magnitudes, the divine realities of Jesus' life as things tied on to His human life, — and not as fruitage of the human. Is the "divinity of Christ" a superadded thing; or the very unveiling of the majesty of God in the one place in history where the beauty of holiness and the perfection of love in the human life could reveal the Living God dwelling in the flesh, — *i.e.* in the form of human life and speech? Is

the revelation of God related or unrelated to this most glorious fruitage of our spiritual world? Is the divinity of Christ a purely spiritual doctrine, or partly magical?

More than once Jesus Himself tried to help men to see that loving God and loving men could not be treated in two categories as two acts. More than once He tried to make men know that if they could not discover God through the human, they would miss the vision of the divine. "He that doth not love his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The two great commandments are one commandment. We are not to strive to think God and love God by some sheer act of transcendent faith that lifts us out of the human. We are not to strive to please God in some ceremonial act of worship which is not a moral act. We are not to picture a throne where clouds of glory eternally gather to hide the majesty of a face upon which no human eye can look and live. We are to put aside these artificial, Oriental symbols of glory, and see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The Man, Christ Jesus, is the fulfilment of



all that inadequate symbolism. We are to read the character and purpose and presence of God in the life of the Son of Man. And if looking at the vision of the divine incarnated in humanity reveals to the inner eye of the soul a glimpse of the Living God unspeakable, and dwelling in unutterable glory, we will worship the mystery of a holiness that no human life and no human world can wholly contain. But the path to such a vision is surely through the human. The fundamental truth of the incarnation is that we reach divinity through humanity. We come to the Father through Jesus. No man cometh to the Father but by Him. We cannot come to the conception of the Christian's God but by Him. We know God and think God, not by inventing new categories, but rather by seeing new depths of meaning in our human modes of life and thought.

By way of justification of this principle of incarnation, I may cite some words of Jesus which must bring conviction to the man who is not looking too intently into the heavens to find God. I refer to the

occasion when two of his own disciples were quarrelling over preferment and honour in a coming Kingdom above the clouds. Jesus at a stroke showed the poverty of that shabby glory where men dazzle the populace by sitting on thrones at the right or left of the king. He called these dreamers unto Him and said unto them: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." When we remember that Jesus constantly taught that they who saw Him saw the Father, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that God is Christlike. Our best thought of God is of a Coworking God, a God who shares, a God who serves. Jesus loved us, and gave Himself in ministry for us. God is like that, says Jesus. Nay, it is God who thus divinely gives Himself for us in the

life of Jesus, is the intent of our creeds. *The symbolism of the Cross points straight to a sympathetic, suffering God whose purposes are bound up with ours and whose life is poured out in the world's struggle.* There is ground for infinite hope for every man in that conception of God.

Up to a certain point we have read the lesson of Jesus' incarnation and have rejoiced in a Christlike God of love. But instead of humanizing our thought of God, we have invented some new categories of thought in order to keep God great. Instead of deepening our own moral meanings, and thus finding vehicles for our thought of the divine, we have invented some wonderful conceptions of the necessities of the divine life, and then have administered to these necessities by some marvellous theories of atonement and the like.

"If our love were but more simple,
We would take Him at his word."

When we see God in terms of the true humanity of Jesus, and when we interpret God in Christ only in terms of our own moral realities, — our love and sympathy

and self-sacrifice, — then some very respectable theology will float away as useless, and some very deep religion will flow in to show us how profound and sweet and strong the current of spiritual life is.

“A sound theology is simply the facts of our personal life writ large.” A theology is simply a way of conceiving God and His relationship to the world. And those conceptions will inevitably be drawn from experience, if they are to have reality and power for us. How important, then, that our experience shall comprehend profoundly and sympathetically — yes, vicariously and vitally — the experience and life of that Man who was and is “humanity’s best man.” How important it is that the experience of a theological student shall ring true, and run deep, and mount high, that he may sympathetically understand the Man, Christ Jesus, and thus in his own experience win conceptions which are the very condition of knowing God. The intellectual tests of our classroom may not truly test our knowledge of God; in the last analysis it can only be revealed by a spiritual test that tries men’s

hearts. If Jesus incarnated the very God by deepening the experiences of the human, by sounding the unplumbed depths of human realities, by raising human meanings to their highest power; must I not come to Christ by the incarnation principle, and find God in Christ by the vital principle of incarnation? It is infinitely harder than the shallow intellectual method of learning a theology in the schools; of defending a doctrine of incarnation! It means that I must push to the bottom of spiritual experience, in order to know the language of spiritual meanings. The cost of incarnation is great; but the reward is life's supreme reward, — the knowledge and companionship of the Most High. Having fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ is a description of this supreme human reality.

If Jesus is the truth about God, we must sympathetically fathom Jesus' human nature to know God. We must not look for surplusage, for flowers tied on, for prodigies. We must follow Jesus into the awful depths of moral meanings and up to the awful heights of spiritual achievement that

lie open to the human. We must drink His cup. "Who among the mighty can be likened unto Him?" Not one moral hero of the race can compare with Him in moral sublimity. He stands alone as the Revealer of God, saying: "I and the Father are one. He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." If we have sympathetically fathomed this astonishing Man, we will think God and understand God in terms of these overflowing human meanings which break our hearts by their tenderness and command our loyalty by their truth. God is love — a human word! We must interpret every doctrine of Creation, of Redemption, of Fatherhood, of Sovereignty, of Service, in terms of incarnate love. Jesus is the Living Truth about God.

III. I must attend briefly to a third phase of the religious problem. Jesus is the "Life" for our humanity only as we see our human life in Him. Religion, our great human fact, must be redefined in terms of the humanity of Jesus Christ. I am thinking now of the great problem of bringing the divine life, the supernatural power, to the service of the human. I am thinking

of the practical problem of redeeming all this mass of teeming life in our human world, by linking it in conscious union with the divine. The supreme problem of religion is not that of gaining right intellectual conceptions of our God nor of the Mediator between God and men; but of getting a dynamic saving relation established between the divine and the human. To bring the consciousness and the presence and the power of the divine into human life and work, — this is the ultimate religious problem. And the Man, Christ Jesus, is the solution of this problem.

Note what a vast problem it is that confronts the Christian Church. Temporal and secular interests are defeating the spiritual to an appalling extent. Our characteristic colossal sins are symptomatic of the pace at which we live. Nerves, worry, insanity, suicide; unrestrained ambition, issuing in lust and moral flabbiness in social relations, and in grinding greed and graft and unholy risks and alliances in the political and economic world. "Sinning by syndicate" is Professor Ross' striking phrase to express the sinister ways in

which our sins are organized into the complex life of society. These, and all the subtle forms of sin that infest life and tempt good men's souls in every age! Our sins are marring our spiritual life and menacing the very foundations of our civilization. These destroying facts undermining the spiritual life of our day constitute the problem of the church.

And the preaching of living religion is the only cure for it. The Living God is the only Saviour mighty enough to save us from the ruinous power of sin. The people must see God, and they must see Him in the life of to-day. It is not enough that they should be taught of a transcendent holy being to be worshipped. We must preach the truth of the incarnation. We must make the people see all of this life "in God." We must preach the incarnate God. We must preach the One God, and the one mediator between God and men, Himself Man, Christ Jesus. Our characteristic human problems need God, but they need Him translated into terms of humanity. The human form and human flesh and human work and human service

and human love, — these must all be redemptive agencies, through which the voice of God shall speak to men. The preaching of the human Jesus, with flesh and bone and nerve; with temptations and aspirations and insults; with hunger and weariness and anguish; an outcast, spit upon, killed by the people whom He loved and served, — and yet the incarnation of the One God! Despised and rejected of men! It is a human picture which somehow expresses all the groans and crying and speechless woe of the human heart. And it was in the form of this Suffering Servant of humanity that the living, loving God came in and dwelt in our needy world. It was that Man, Christ Jesus, in whom God dwelt in all fulness. And He alone — by such a life — has brought the truth of God and his kingdom home to human hearts. We thirst for the eternal; but the path to the eternal lies through the doing of the temporal. It is by incarnation, by dwelling in the suffering flesh, that God comes home to the experiences and consciousness of men. The greed and the lust and the selfishness and the forms of

sin that hurt and destroy the life of our day need to see God in the flesh — need to know that He dwells here, and not on high.

Whether our eyes are fixed upon the missionary problem, the crying social evils of our day, the myriad forms of brutality and selfishness that devour widow's houses and destroy little children, — spiritual religion is the only salvation. And spiritual religion can only grow out of the revelation of God in the human, the Helper of the helpless, the Lover and Saviour of the neglected and the outcast. And the Man, Christ Jesus, is the revelation of the saving Life of God.

Jesus is the Life; the Life of God. When we learn what Jesus meant, I think that the pagan conception of a heaven where God dwells apart will disappear. God's home is in our homes, in hearts and lives that afford Him fellowship, in work that affords Him coöperation. I do not think that we ought to teach that incarnation is divine "humiliation." It is divine glory, God's opportunity. God did not "empty Himself"; He glorified Himself in Jesus.

The incarnation was not a defeat; it was the supremely successful outworking of God's eternal purpose. The divine defeat, the real humiliation, is in these hearts of ours that will not open for His indwelling. His humiliation is that the life of our human world is still so largely oblivious to His purposes of love and closed to His appeal. The lament of Jesus rings in our ears yet: "And ye would not come unto Me that ye might have life!"

In the practical sense, then, of making the world religious, I feel that this must be the dominant note; to show people that true religion takes the normal forms of human life. And to do this we must remove that slander which largely holds the thinking of the people, that the human is alien to the divine and that by a prodigy or a miracle or a humiliation God comes into our human world. That heresy, preserved in some of our hymns and doctrines, prejudices our cause. Christ Jesus is forever the refutation of that untruth, as He is forever the supreme revelation and the supreme incarnation of the Living God dwelling with us. We must preach Jesus, not chiefly

as the exception, but as the perfection. We must not call people out of the world to give them a vision of God, but show them God at work in their work. They must not look for unhuman lineaments in the face of Jesus, but learn to love His human face, and in loving Him see God in His eyes.

Says one teacher effectively, "If we would make humanity Christian, we must keep Christianity human." And as I think of the problem of Christianizing all of the splendid complex life of to-day; the problem of bringing to it the conviction of the Living God and teaching people obedience to His loving purposes; the problem of bringing a dynamic, the *power* of salvation to people, I feel that the condition of meeting this Herculean task is to have the people learn God in the Man, Christ Jesus. They must follow the human Jesus until in the depths of moral experience — every man for himself — there is formed that Petrine conviction and confession: "This is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" And with this regenerating conviction working in our lives, we are to bring every district of human life and activity into obedience

to the heavenly vision. When redemption is complete, human life will be human life still, throbbing on with all of its manifold interests and social developments. Yet it will be a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, a glorified race regenerated by love. The power of this regeneration will be the Son of Man with marred face and broken body, mediating God to every one who will hear His voice and open the door to His incoming.

Redemptive religion, then, is the solution of the practical problem that confronts us. God is the Redeemer. We must preach the Living God. We must not preach Him as "Lord of all being, throned afar," but as the Power at work in our human world. Robert Browning has caught and crystallized into speech this cry of the soul for God wearing human flesh :

"'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for ! my
flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead ! I seek and I find it. O Saul,
it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee ; a Man
like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a
Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand!"

A human hand, a human face, a human life, a human Mediator! Incarnation is not an expedient, not a device. It is the unveiling of the permanent truth that the love of God can only be revealed to us in human life and language; and that the completest vision of the divine must be expressed in the completest human. Atonement is not a scheme; it is the divine character expressed in action. Christ is our Vision of God. Obedience to this heavenly vision means that you and I, disciples, can transform secularism into religion, sin into holiness, only in the measure that we incarnate God in life, thus making people aware of the Coworking God in our common world.

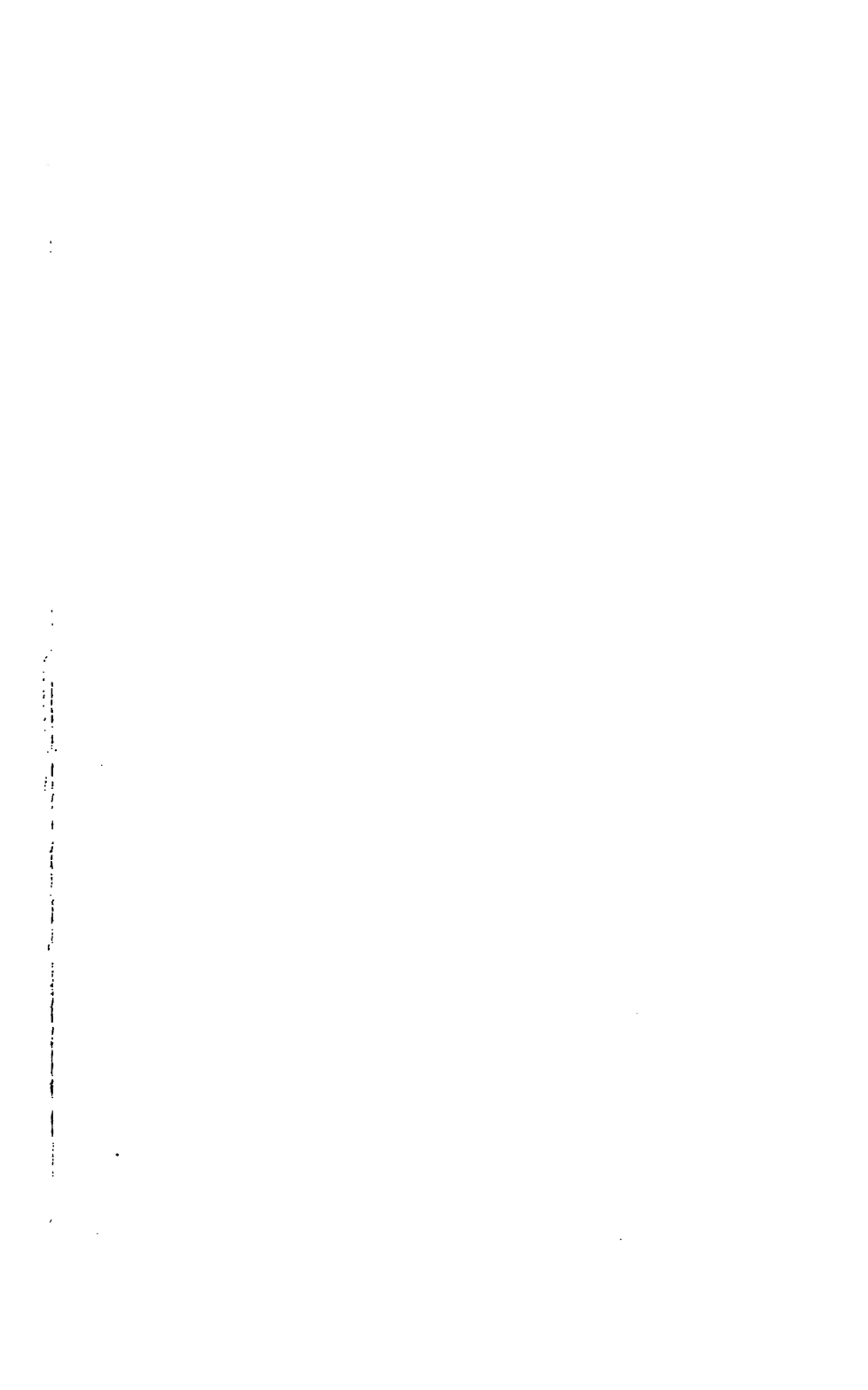
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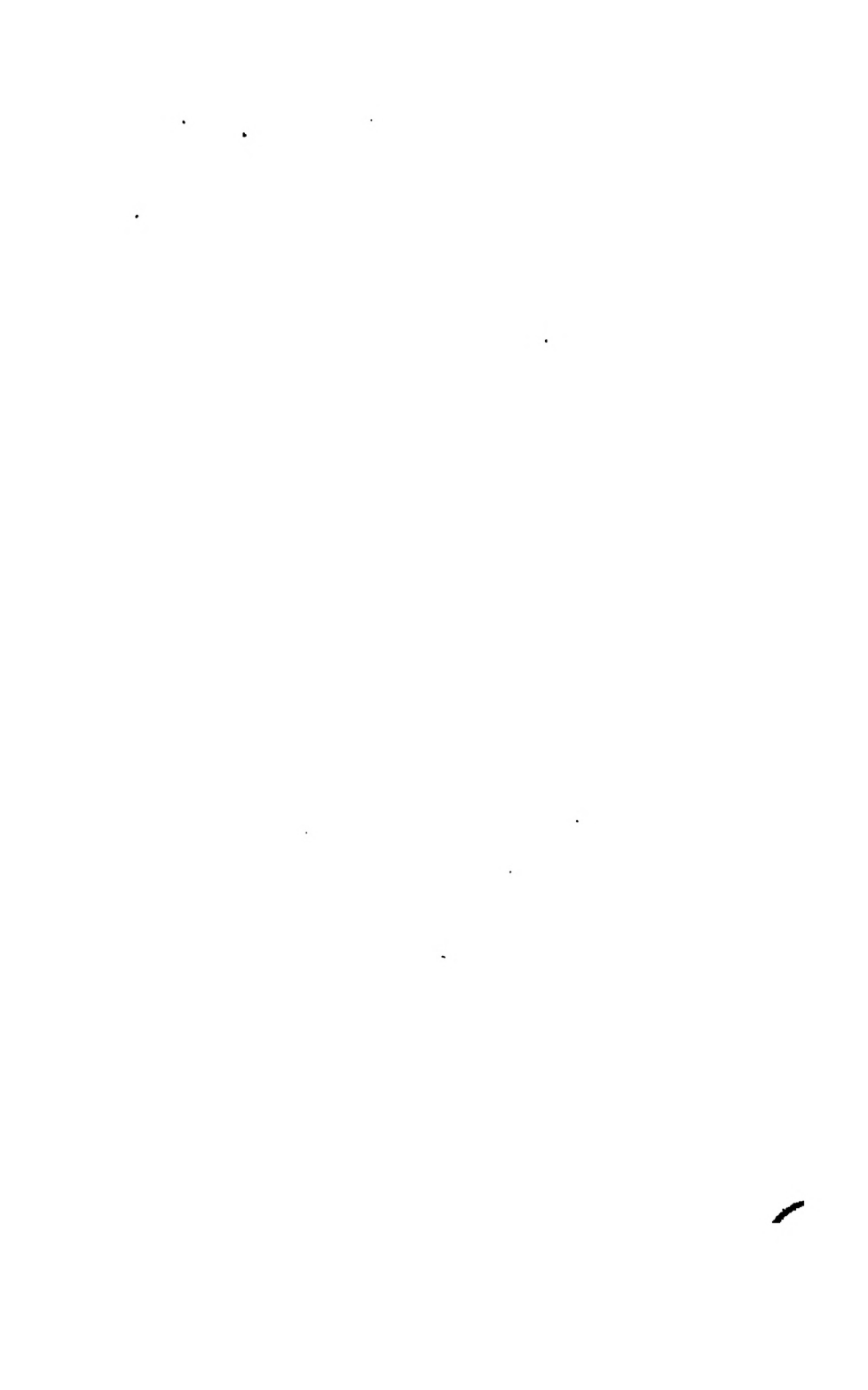
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